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THE STORY OF A NEW ENGLAND ARISTOCRAT WHO HATED
PUBLICITY AND MADE OF HIS SECRET TRAGEDY
A BAFFLING MYSTERY

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THE Rhona King who looked at herself in her glass that evening was unlike anything she could have imagined. The demure young woman who had lectured equably on literature to her classes had given place to a radiant beauty flushed with excitement and for once garbed in a mode decreed by fashion.

It was raining when she started out, and it seemed economy to telephone for a taxicab. Before she had reached her destination the weather cleared, and she dismissed the cab a few blocks before she came to the house of her friend.

She felt her face burning, and desired to become cooler ere she entered the overheated apartments with their scores of guests. And perhaps there was a certain element of nervousness that decided her to put off for a few minutes her entrance.

As Rhona passed one of the great mansions on her right, a house from whose windows no lights shone out, she saw a woman open the front door and run down the steps to the sidewalk. There was in the stranger's actions such an unwonted hurry that Rhona's attention was instantly claimed by it, and she turned to see if anything unusual had happened. As she looked intently she saw the woman stand for a moment wringing her hands and then hold a handkerchief to her eyes.

Rhona was now so near that she could see it was a woman of middle age, richly dressed, who seemed to be in the grip of some very powerful emotion. Instinctively the girl paused.

"I'm afraid," she said gently, "you are in trouble."

It was a tear-stained face that was turned

to her, well favored, and all unused to the portrayal of the poignant suffering that now possessed it. She had the appearance of a prosperous, happy woman, now almost beside herself at some impending misfortune. The hand that clung to Rhona's arm was shaking.

"I am so frightened!" she wailed. "I am so frightened!"

The younger woman, not without knowledge that guile may often underlie fair appearances, gave to the other a prolonged yet sympathetic scrutiny. In her own new clothes, she must present for the first time an appearance of affluence; and she remembered that she carried with her what was for one of her means a considerable sum of money.

But her examination of the distressed woman reassured her. This was plainly no criminal intent on her modest bankroll. It was, instead, a woman whose face, although distorted with grief, bore the graving of happiness. But she was now so overcome by her terrors that Rhona placed a protecting arm about her.

"It will be all right," she said comfortingly, after the manner of those who promise relief to frightened children.

As she said this there were sounds of feet coming nearer out of the misty evening. The woman gripped her arm. "I want you to come with me," she whispered, looking over her shoulder as if in terror of the approaching pedestrians. "I am faint with fear, and I must have some one with me. Will you come?"

Rhona hesitated for a moment. She would be late at the function to which she was bidden, but might there not be good reason for it? After all, what would it matter if an unexpected guest were tardy? Here was a woman obsessed with some mysterious affliction who saw in her a tower of strength.

The house from which the other had fled was in one of those old streets which had altered little with the city's growth. Its houses, too large for occupation by any but people of wealth, had not yet been sacrificed to make tenements for needy aliens, as had others not far distant. They remained inviolate, preserving an air of calm and conscious dignity, fronting on a wide, level street and looking backward over a broad river. It was a district which reassured Rhona.

"Very well," she said, "I will come."

The elder woman pressed her hand gratefully, and led her hurriedly up the broad stone steps and into a big hall unlighted save for a single candle. At the head of a long flight of stairs the stranger turned and walked along the pile carpet to a room facing the street. The shades were closely drawn, and the light of the single candle gave the big apartment an air of mystery, which was dispelled when the electric lights were switched on.

Rhona looked about her curiously. It was a library, and three sides of it were book lined. Splendid rugs were on the floor, and there were many marbles and bronzes. It was a room occupied by people of taste and wealth. Although she had no opportunity for knowing, she felt that what ornaments she saw were of peculiar excellence. She had never been in a room where this quiet richness obtained in so large a degree.

Its air brightened her apprehensive mood. Outside there was a sense of tragedy about the frightened woman, but such a thought here seemed ludicrous. It must be some domestic happening of which she was to hear, some small thing magnified many diameters by a woman unused to worry.

She conceived the stranger to be a hysterical person easily moved to tears through trivial causes. She waited for her to make some sort of explanation, but the woman only sat there looking into nothingness.

After a time this silence grew disquieting.

"All this seems exceedingly odd," Rhona began.

Her voice stirred the other into speech.

"If odd were only the right word," she returned, "I should not be sitting here now wondering how old these hours of weeping will make me look, or asking myself if I shall ever know another minute of happiness in my life."

"I wish you would tell me how I can be of help," the girl responded. "I am not a physician or even a nurse, but just an ordinary woman on her way to a party."

"I want neither physician nor nurse," the other retorted. "I want some one like you who is strong and has sympathy and understanding."

"Understanding for what?" Rhona inquired. It was strange, she thought, that this woman should remain so indefinite if she needed help.

The other looked at her entreatingly. "Don't ask me now," she said. "You can help me by being here and waiting for me."

I shall not be long. Look at books or magazines, but promise me you won't desert me. Is it too much for a frightened woman to ask who has not her daughter to comfort her? My dear, I have guessed you are generous as well as strong."

Her tremendous earnestness was not without its effect. "Very well," Rhona said with a smile of comfort, "I will wait."

It had never been necessary for Rhona King to determine whether she were dowered with that quality that is called bravery. Few such opportunities come in the life of modern man and fewer into woman's existence. Her possible courage or cowardice had never been drawn upon by exigency.

Had she been craven, those long minutes of waiting might well have discovered it. She was conscious only of a sense of unusual alertness; of muscles and nerves co-ordinating to an uncommon degree for some shock which she felt impending. The well-filled book shelves, that under ordinary circumstances would have attracted her notice and interest, were scarcely seen.

The silence began to force itself upon her. There was no sound in the room or in the great house. So long an interval as had passed since the stranger left her must have been filled with something more than attendance on a trivial matter. And why should a grown woman sob so wearily if some great calamity had not befallen?

Half an hour had passed. Then her heart was set beating the more violently by the sound of a telephone bell ringing in a distant hall. It seemed to the girl to ring for a full minute; after that there fell that silence which had now grown terrifying. She rose to her feet and flung open the door.

The passage was unlighted, and there was no gleam of light through any hinge's chink or from the hall below. At first she was minded to call aloud for the stranger, but the darkness and silence held her dumb.

Suppose, after all, it was some case of deadly sickness which distressed the other? The stranger had taken the candle with her, and from her post at the door the girl could not discover the electric button to illuminate the dark corridor.

Then she advanced a few steps along the passage, groping for the knob which would turn it instantly into a lighted and cheerful path. But it was hidden from her, and, as she moved cautiously along, the library door swung to and she was plunged into utter darkness.

It was a black silence full of dimly apprehended horror; there was a quality about it akin to those first unquiet moments when one awakes from a nightmare. And what should have been a cheerful home was suddenly invested with the character of a place filled with terrors that only awaited her discovery.

She endeavored to summon her habitual self-control, and told herself she should be furiously angry with the strange woman for having placed her in this invidious position. But her indignation, feigned as it was, brought her little comfort, and she knew she was herself in the clutch of fear.

She called aloud, but none answered her. Almost it seemed to her excited fancy that there were, all about her, scarcely audible sounds as of people close at hand who tried to make their breathing noiseless. Her main object now was to escape, and she pushed along the passage, hoping to come to the head of the long flight of stairs that would lead her to the front door.

Feeling her way along the hall, she touched the knob of the door, which yielded to her soft pressure and opened. Here, at least, was an opportunity, she thought, to get light, and her fingers sought the button where such projections were usually found. Presently she was successful, and shrank back almost blinded by the gush of light.

In the middle of the room was a high bed, and on it, lying among white coverlets streaked with a dreadful red, was a man with his throat cut. She took in no details of the large and splendid chamber, but only this horror staring up at the ceiling with the half closed eyes of the dead.

Rushing from the room, she retraced without misstep her way to the lighted library, and thence to a window, which she threw open.

"Help!" she cried into the still street below. "Help! Help!"

And almost as her voice rang out, she was sorry for the primal instinct which had betrayed her. She was recovering her self-possession in a measure, and realized immediately that her presence in this house would, if discovered by unfriendly searchers, lead her to the prisoners' dock on a capital charge.

She closed the window quickly and pulled down the shade. If her shriek had not been heard she would make her way out of this house of death and back to her own quiet rooms. It seemed, she thought almost in-

coherently, a judgment upon her for wanton extravagance and the forsaking of her habitual way of life.

And if by mischance she had been heard by some passer along the street, she would send for the president of her college. He would believe her story. There was something, she assured herself nervously, in having a clean record.

And as she thought this, that last interview with her father recurred to her. She had threatened to kill herself. People—newspaper men—detectives—always burrowed into the past lives of all those suspected of complicity in crime, as hers would be if she were found alone in this great, silent house. It would be assumed that she was a revengeful woman of vindictive nature and a capacity for evil carefully cloaked.

And that third degree she had read of! It had forced confessions from stronger than she. She called to mind one story where they blindfolded a suspect and brought him before his dead victim, and then, suddenly stripping the bandage from his eyes, forced a panicky confession from him. Suppose they should do this with her, and drag her unwittingly to the bedside of what lay only a few yards distant with a gash in its throat!

She realized that this was hysteria creeping upon her, and fought to keep it down. People had always supposed her to be strong, and she felt she must be worthy of such belief. It would be wiser to turn off the light and then see from the window if the street appeared deserted.

And as she looked out she saw two men in the act of crossing the street toward the house. One was clearly a policeman; the other, of the same height, but of slighter build, was in civilian dress; no doubt, she thought, horrified, a detective. She knew they had heard her cry and were about to search the mansion. And when they came up the steps and were shut out from her vision, there was only one thought left to her, to hide so that by chance she might escape.

She crouched behind a great bronze of the Winged Victory of Samothrace; it was a poor hiding place, but the best the chamber afforded. After some minutes of waiting there were steps on the stairs which even the pile carpet could not dull. If only they passed the library door and ascended the stairs she might escape after all.

But the turning handle of the door denied her such a hope ere it was scarcely formulated. It was fate! This, then, was the bad end her father had prophesied so vindictively ten years before!

She heard quick breathing and the rasping of a hand feeling along the burlapped wall for the switch button that was not immediately within its compass. And then the flood of light shot out, and she realized that her position was one which would lend color to any theory connecting her with the murder.

She was discovered almost as the light enwrapped her. The blue black muzzle of a revolver was a few inches from her head. A moment after she was dragged to her feet by the policeman.

"What are you doing here?" he snapped, and stared curiously at her expression of fear.

He was a big man, square shouldered and strong, with a fleshy face and heavy projecting jaw. She looked into small bright eyes that held a hundred horrid suspicions of her. Behind him, framed in the doorway, was the man she supposed was the detective, his face concealed by the brim of the big hat he wore.

"What are you hiding for?" the policeman demanded roughly.

"I was frightened," she gasped.

"What was it?" he demanded, shaking her a little.

She pointed, shuddering, through the open door where the detective stood.

"There's a man there," she cried, "lying murdered. Go down there and see what I did."

The policeman dragged her to the door. "Show me," he commanded.

The man whose face she had not seen walked down the passage and pushed open the door. Into the big room the policeman took her, and she was compelled to look again on that from which she had fled, shrieking.

The dead man was dressed in a suit of brown tweed, and he lay comfortably on a scarcely disarranged bed. There was nowhere to be seen any sign of struggle or disturbance. He lay, but for the pendent head and half shut eyes, as calmly as though he were sleeping the natural sleep, instead of that last slumber.

She was taken back into the library and pushed into a chair, and handcuffs snapped about her slender white wrists. The police-

man gazed at her keenly. She knew that he was trying and hoping to find in her face some resemblance to those photographs of criminals which it was his duty to memorize. She saw that he was disappointed in his efforts, and looked about him as though to discover some more tangible evidence of her guilt.

There was a silver net purse containing a few things of no particular value that lay on the long library table. She had placed it there when she was waiting.

"This yours?" he cried, taking it up.

"Yes," she said, and watched him open it. He drew out first some keys, and she thought she had left all of hers at home except the small latchkey she needed. Then he took out a handkerchief, a pencil, and something that he snatched at triumphantly. It was a razor, its ivory handle stained and its edge serrated.

The man who still stood in the doorway, guarding it as it were, started, and muttered something under his breath when the razor was held up.

"It's not my bag!" the girl cried, realizing that these mesh chain purses vary so little as to make a mistake such as hers easily comprehensible. "Mine is like it, but that isn't it!"

The contemptuous grin of disbelief roused her to contest so monstrous a charge. "I never saw it before!" she exclaimed wildly. "I can prove—"

The man turned on her with a snarl. "Cut that out!" he cried. "There'll be time for you to prove things later on."

He was undecided what course to take. Envious, intolerant, and suspicious, he was convinced that unless he were very careful his superiors would rob him of the reward and credit to which this capture must entitle him. He was not trusted at headquarters, and knew he was possessed of too little skill to bring this affair to a successful issue on his own responsibility. And he knew, too, that he had too much liquor in him to be, even at his modest best.

He feared, if he contravened any of the department's regulations or permitted his naturally ugly temper to get the better of him when other men came to take charge, he would be reprimanded and robbed of his opportunity to be the hero in a murder case. Dully he repeated to himself that the men higher up would be jealous, and he, Finneran, would get the dirty end of the stick, as had been ever his fortune.

But there was one friend on the force, a sergeant who was from the same village, a man well liked by his superiors. Haggerty would see he was not done dirt.

He turned to the silent man in the doorway. "There's a phone in the lower hall; we passed it coming up. Go down and get my sergeant on the wire"—he gave his name and number—"and tell him I want him to come here mighty quick, and not tell any one else. Don't talk to nobody but him." The man in the doorway did not instantly go to do his bidding. The policeman was on edge. "Damn it," he exploded, "get a move on!"

Only the previous day he had been reprimanded by the commissioner for undue violence in making an arrest. Here was his opportunity to prove his value and get the support of an evening paper which made much of the cause of the common man.

The man he addressed frowned at the discourteous, brutal tone. "Isn't it your duty to interrogate this lady?" he asked. "You haven't listened to what she may have to tell. You can see she is unnerved, as any one might be who saw a man lying dead. You ought to hear her side." He spoke in a curious, muffled tone, and she barely heard him.

"Lady!" sneered her captor. "I've got her number. Get a move on, I tell you!"

The man shrugged and left the room, and presently there was heard the tinkling of the telephone and the distant sound of a voice talking over the wires. Two or three minutes passed, and the policeman was growing impatient at the delay. He walked backward and forward, muttering oaths the while. Finally he could support it no longer. He wheeled round to the prisoner in the chair.

"Don't you dare move!" he threatened. She watched him stride to the door and out into the passage. Almost at the same moment came the violent sound of a scuffle and his voice raised in anger. And then his shouts died away in a lessening volume, and finally there was again a dreadful brooding silence in the house.

She shuddered in terror. Was this man, too, the victim of those who killed by night?

She found herself surprised at the calmness with which she awaited the coming of those whom she supposed would silence her, too. Like the officer, she was a witness whose dumbness must be assured.

Her watching eyes saw the door pushed open, and into the room came the man she had thought to be a detective. His hat was gone, and there was blood on his forehead. But it was the face of one she knew.

There looked at her, smiling and calm, no less a person than Professor John Southard, of the university. He came swiftly toward her and unlocked the handcuffs.

Not able in that moment of confusion to rid herself of the haunting fears that possessed her, she looked up at his kindly face with apprehension. What struggle had she heard, and what blood was it on his forehead? Why had he attacked the policeman? Or was what she had listened to the effort of the police officer to subdue the murderer, who might be lurking close at hand? And where was the woman?

She recalled stories she had heard of Southard connected with a series of articles in a quarterly on the psychology of the modern criminal, and that he had consorted with the underworld in his search. Was it possible, for all his reputation, that underlying his nature there was a sympathy for crime and criminals which had culminated in this night of mystery?

"I want you to tell me all about it," he said gently.

"Don't you know, then?" she asked, and a moment later repented of her answer. It was a strong face and a kind one that looked down at her, and there was no trace in it of those ugly passions which must mark the criminal. She knew instinctively, as she became calmer, that he was her friend, anxious to help.

And with this altered outlook she became the more concerned with her safety. How to one who had seen her crouching in terror of detection could she appear aught but a guilty creature? And he had seen the razor taken from a bag which she admitted at first was her own.

"What can I tell you?" she answered. "I know nothing."

"What made you call for help?" he asked. "And how is it you came here in the first place?"

As coherently as she could, she told him what had happened.

"Can you possibly believe it?" she asked when she had finished.

"Of course," he returned simply. "Why not?"

She looked at him anxiously. To her grief-filled mind the evidence against her

was so conclusive as to render credence in her story almost unbelievable. Could it be that he pretended to comfort her and gain time until he thought how to proceed?

"You really and truly believe me?" she asked again.

He saw something of her fears, and tried to assure her. "So much," he said, "that even before I asked you I basely took advantage of an officer of the law and deposited him, trussed like a fowl, in a closet filled with sheets and pillow slips."

"Oh, how could you do it!" she cried in distress. It seemed that his untoward action must aggravate her supposed offense and complicate matters further.

"My dear Miss King," he returned quietly, "don't you comprehend that you are in a very serious position, and that escape seems the only way out of arrest and imprisonment? I could think of nothing else than tying him up until we've had time to formulate some plan of action and get things shipshape. If we are taken here, literally red-handed, we shall find ourselves involved in such notoriety that, academically at least, we shall be dead."

She looked apprehensively toward the door. "The man may escape."

Southard shook his head. "Never!" he answered. "He is safe until some samaritan comes along and unties him; but I want you not to stay here a moment longer than you must in order to arrange your hair and put your hat straight and so on."

She seemed hardly to hear him, but sat looking into the corner and seeing nothing.

"All appearances are against you if you are caught here," he reminded her. "I myself imagined a murderess was crouching behind that bronze until I recognized you, or at least an accessory to the crime. You see plainly you must leave here, and at once, before any other witness comes in."

"I have done nothing," she said with a touch of obstinacy. It seemed incredible that there need be any difficulty in proving herself guiltless, even though appearances seemed at first sight so much against her.

"Yes, you have!" he cried. "You are here in what amounts to a disguise."

She looked up in astonishment. The succession of shocks had banished from her mind her elaborate costume.

"Your clothes," he asserted; "and that way of doing your hair. I didn't recognize you until I had heard your voice. No matter what reason you may give for the

change, it will be taken as evidence against you. It will be charged against you that you entered a strange house in what virtually is a disguise and concealed in your chain purse the weapon that had just taken a man's life. It can be proved that you were not called upon to do so in self-defense.

"Your manner instantly convinced the officer of your guilt. Will you be more fortunate in convincing a jury otherwise? Your defense will be that you were called in by a strange woman."

"But I was," she asserted, "and she may be in the house while we are talking. She may be listening to us."

"I don't think so," he said, in a way that seemed odd to her. "I hardly think so. In any case, your defense will sound lamentably weak."

"Anybody who knows me—" she began wildly. His manner had frightened her.

He interrupted. "Exactly. 'Any one who knows you.' But who does know you? On your own confession you have made few acquaintances at Radcliffe and hardly a friend. You have been draped about with a certain air of mystery; in a word, you are unusual, not conforming to any usual type, and it will be used against you as a weapon in the hands of the prosecution. I have seen too much of the wrongs wrought by circumstantial evidence to want you to depend too much on it. We must get out of here at once."

"But why should you be dragged into it?" she demanded, realizing now for the first time to what risks he had gone for her. She felt that there was closing around her a net whose meshes permitted no escape. The forces of the law were arraying themselves against her.

"You had nothing to do with it!" she exclaimed. "I can't allow you to ruin your career through my fault."

He smiled at her in a very friendly and reassuring fashion. "I shall do as I choose," he returned. "You are a member of the sister faculty, and I shall elect to be captured with you or escape, as you see fit. At present you invite arrest."

She moved over to a glass. "I look ghastly," she admitted, "and this weird hat is all awry." She attempted to assume becoming composure. "I won't pretend that I'm not very much frightened, Mr. Southard, and I beg that you'll stick by me till I'm somewhere where there are people and electric street lamps."

"I shall not part from you until you're home," he answered.

The light from the upper corridor illumined the stairs and the entrance hall sufficiently to let them make their escape easily.

"No matter whether there are people about or not," he whispered, "we must go out as unconcernedly as if we lived here."

It was raining again when they closed the front door behind them, and not a soul came into their field of vision. They walked across one of the side streets until, in Boylston, he hailed a passing taxicab and ordered the driver to take them to her rooms in Cambridge.

During the ride she was silent. Not yet recovered from her terror, she welcomed this quiet drive as a means to regaining her control before listening to what suggestion the man at her side had to make.

Her rooms, small after those vast apartments from which she had come, seemed cheerful and intimate. Into the open fireplace she threw a handful of sticks, and had before many minutes a lively blaze.

II

Was this, then, romance, this tragic prelude to further dismaying adventure into which she soon would be plunged? A sordid beginning, truly, and yet, when she could for an instant obliterate memory of the horror through which she had just passed, the moment at hand had its romantic aspects.

Rhona King's upbringing had been of a nature to crush whatever of romance there might have been in her. Her father had but one idea, and that the amassing of money. In the making of it he insisted upon a niggardliness in the home that kept his wife and only child almost entirely within the confines of their lonely farm.

Rhona had no friends and no pleasures. She wondered why poets had written so much of the glory of youth.

When she was fourteen her mother undertook her only successful rebellion against her husband. Suddenly, and without warning, the poor lady had given up the struggle and plunged the house—it was on the morning of washing day that she took her leave of life—into confusion and distress.

For the year that followed, Rhona put her idle hours aside and attended to her father's needs, washed for him, and cooked for him, and kept house as best she might

with occasional help. What recreation she took was in the form of rambles around the chain of beautiful fresh water ponds that lay about her.

Sometimes fishermen, driving back in the quiet evening, would meet a shy woodland nymph, sun-tanned and decked with crimson blossoms in her wild black hair. And there was one fisherman, spending his summer vacation near by, who contrived to talk to her. He was an artless youth and without guile, but ready of speech and apt at compliment.

After their first and only meeting she went home with cheeks ablaze with a new happiness. She had been told she was pretty, and that he would write a poem about her and bring it next day and read it to her.

Ellery King saw her unusual look, and terrified her into confession of her innocent happiness. It brought him to a realization that his daughter was soon to leave her childhood behind. It awakened him to the danger in which all pretty maids might be led, and he locked her in an upper chamber next day and swore to whip her if she ventured along the sandy lanes again without his permission.

From that day she took to hoarding her little moneys until there was saved enough to take her to the house of a relative who lived in Newton. The harsh creed that had released her mother from life's cares could not kill in the robust daughter the belief that there was color in the world, and music and laughter.

The father, speeding after her, met a creature he had not known. A pale, resolute girl, who said if he took her back she would kill herself. And for once the stern man believed her; then he washed his hands of her, prophesying an evil fate.

Discussing this amazing event with his few intimates, he said it was plainly no fault of his own. He attributed it jointly to the influence of the devil and his own grandfather, a free-living, rum-drinking sportsman who had wasted his patrimony but made himself nevertheless the most popular man in Plymouth County.

Her mother's aunt, with whom she had found sanctuary, was not long in finding that her niece possessed a great capacity for learning and a remarkable memory. She aided Rhona in every way possible, and had her reward when the girl made steady advance and eventually won an assistant

professorship in a small Southern university as a teacher of English literature. After a year spent there she came North again, this time to join the staff of Radcliffe. It was an astonishing progress for one whose early instruction had been so meager.

At this distinguished center of learning she found herself occupying an anomalous position. Feeling herself to be wholly without those lighter airs and graces, which she admired intensely when she beheld them in other girls, and unwilling to betray her ignorance, she shunned those social gatherings to which she was bidden when first she joined the Radcliffe staff.

In comparison with those women she envied, she thought she was deplorably gauche and ludicrously nervous, and she shed tears in silence for the faults which were only imaginary. She had a natural grace of carriage and features too good ever to be massed with those plainer sisters who appear born to act as foils for their better favored companions.

But since she had plainly demonstrated to her fellows that social diversions were not sought, they left her alone without bitterness. She was one, they assumed, to whom such entertainment was of little worth. They could not know, for instance, that she feared to join their fun because she had never been allowed to learn to dance, and dancing was a marked feature of their gatherings.

They were not to know that her small knowledge of men—the youth in the wood by the ponds and the fellow members of the staff comprised those she had met—was such as to give her a sense of embarrassment at the idea of meeting many of them. She often thought of herself as a working woman, wholly dependent since her aunt's death on her own exertions.

One dismal afternoon in late April she was sitting in her lonely rooms wondering what, after all, her emancipation was worth. There was as little sunlight and color in her life now as at the farm.

And this gray atmosphere was the more oppressive because she no longer gazed about her with the ignorant eyes of childhood, but with the careful judgment of a clever woman who had read much and was book learned in life to an uncommon degree. "A General Survey of English Literature from the Elizabethan Period to George Eliot," upon which she lectured, could not fail to give her a broader outlook.

A girl had just been in to tell her that she was engaged to be married during the coming summer. The prospective husband was a man in business, knowing nothing of the science in which the girl might, had she devoted her life to it, attain some memorable success. Rhona had found her apparently glad to give up everything she had specialized in, to keep house like any other woman.

The young biologist, in the flush of her joy, had sympathy for all unattached girls. "I wonder you're not engaged," she had said admiringly as she looked into Rhona's eyes. "We call you Princess Unapproachable," she laughed. "You are," she insisted; "you never notice your adorers."

There was something of bitterness in Rhona's smile. "I'm afraid I don't," she said.

"You could have them if you wanted to," the other said; "but I suppose you are so particular that no one is good enough. Is that it?"

Rhona answered evasively. She could not talk of these things as easily as, it seemed to her, other women did. So the biologist left her, imagining that there was in her life some profound grief which made another attachment impossible. It tinged the tall, graceful girl with a certain touch of romantic interest in her sight, and made her seclusion comprehensible.

Inevitably Rhona reviewed those few times in her career when she had been moved by men. First there was that poetic angler who would have written verses to her. What, she wondered, had she lost by not hearing them? But he was gone—an image impossible to recapture. There remained only the impression of wavy brown hair and honest eyes.

The one other man to whom she had felt drawn was John Southard, a member of the Harvard faculty, and one of the most graceful of its lecturers on modern literature. She had long known of him as a man wealthy in his own right and extremely popular.

She had attended some of his lectures on romantic literature, and it was the spirit of romance so admirably depicted by him that showed her vaguely what she had missed. There had been none of it in her life, that was certain.

Here she was five and twenty, tall, straight, and better looking than she had ever guessed, and no man had ever made

love to her. No man had ever pretended that he wanted to. Those frequent flirtations she saw all about her never came to her.

She sighed. A sentence of Southard's recurred to her persistently. "Romance," he had said, "lies all about us; the pity is that our eyes are dull and we do not know her when she passes."

What nonsense! Romance! When had romance passed her by, she wondered?

She felt she would like to tax him with talking folly in his lectures. Only once had she spoken to him, and then concerning some detail of her work; he probably had never known her name and would hardly remember her face. She had thought of him as a popular man probably spoiled by adulation and good fortune, and unlikely to waste a moment on any one so insignificant as she.

In this she was wrong, for he had looked at her with unusual interest. On inquiry, he had learned she was brilliant, cold, and impossible of approach.

And he wondered, as he scanned her calm, splendid face, if tragedy lay behind it, and what passages had turned it into a mask. Sometimes these distant women stirred a certain shame in him, and he credited Rhona with such knowledge of men as to make her supposedly scornful attitude a just one.

But if Rhona did not seek him out and rebuke him for his use of phrases that as yet had no meaning for her, she could not banish the sentence that rang in her brain. Had she done her share in seeking romance? And, as she pondered upon it, she decided that romance and flirtation were not, as so many of her giddier acquaintances insisted, synonymous terms. She could hardly define what it meant.

Perhaps it signified a wider sympathy with life and her fellows and no more. And if it did, what chance had she given herself to find out? Her early shy impulse to refuse social invitations had now grown to be a habit.

One of her few friends, a girl who had married into a well-known family, still persisted in spite of non-acceptance to send her invitations. Staring at her from the mantelpiece was a card of invitation to a reception to be held that night in a fashionable part of Boston.

Rhona looked at the clock and saw that it was not yet four. Suppose she deliber-

ately set out to seek romance! It might open the door to her in the guise of a butler, or she might find it in a brilliant unheard-of cousin of her hostess recently returned from doing heroic things.

On the instant she flung open her wardrobe and inspected her gowns. They were dull and frumpy, she admitted; things of neutral shades and unimpassioned tints, suitable for any spinster who desired not to attract notice, but in no sense suited to a girl who could wear flaming hues of orange or scarlet.

An air of excitement took hold on her. She would buy a suitable costume and surprise her friend. When she reached a Tremont Street store a little later, she did not fight off the suggestions of the saleswomen, as she had always done before. Hitherto they had urged her to buy expensive things, and too showy, she had felt.

To-day she allowed the eager and tasteful woman behind the counter to have her own way. The result was a gorgeous gown and a hat she felt dimly was of preposterous magnificence.

The saleswoman had suggested that her style of hairdressing was not compatible with her hat, and recommended that she visit a coiffeur in a new office building a few doors lower down. Rhona was now at a stage where she had ceased from making resistance, and the hairdresser, a few minutes later, was reveling in her thick tresses and transforming them into something rich and strange.

The ensemble was complete when she had stepped forth on her quest of romance, a quest that had plunged her, almost in a twinkling, into a weird and almost unbelievable adventure.

III

"You are wondering," Professor Southard began, when Rhona had removed her hat and was sitting by the fire in a comfortable armchair, "how it was I came to be with that policeman."

"You read my thoughts," she admitted. "I am still wondering."

"I had been talking to him," he returned. "I have a fancy now and then, which burns less fiercely than it used to do, to talk with criminals and their natural enemies, the police. I was interested in Finneran because I had seen him commit an aggravated assault on one of my students who was not intoxicated, as was charged. I wanted to

learn from the man if he had been reprimanded for the reason that I laid information against him before his commissioner.

"I introduced myself to him as a Westerner dismissed from the St. Louis police force for very much the same type of assault he had committed. I carried also a stock of strong cigars, and we were becoming thick friends when your cry for help startled us."

This was why he had dressed in plain, not easily recognized clothes, and wore that big slouch hat, she supposed. It was in keeping with those stories she had heard of him.

"I thought, with the policeman," he continued, "that we had stumbled upon a hideous crime, until I penetrated your disguise and arrayed myself on your side. I knew that it would be with difficulty that you would free yourself from the gravest suspicion, so I took the liberty of depriving Finneran of his freedom. To one unconventional as I the person of a policeman is not sacrosanct."

She looked at the stain on his forehead. "How did that happen?" she demanded.

"Finneran," he returned. "If I had not used guile I might be in his place now. It's nothing, just a scratch. He'll come to no harm."

She looked at him in perplexity. "But ought we to have escaped like that without notifying the authorities?" she demurred.

"Of course not," he retorted. "We ought to go and proclaim what we know to an interested world and take upon ourselves the burden of a crime committed by some one unknown. Ethical considerations might dictate that, and other noble actions, but they would neither discover the real criminal nor add to our happiness. Circumstantial evidence and the weighty brains of prosecuting attorneys, if they don't bring us to the chair in the end, will immediately land us in the Charles Street jail. I can easily fancy that I see the illustrations in the newspapers, with an arrow above my cell window, stating that here Southard, the murderer, takes his daily look at God's sky. Have you ever thought that it may even hurt the cause of higher education?"

"Can't you be serious at such a moment?" she besought him. It seemed to her that, no matter what way they took, inevitable discovery awaited them.

"I am serious," he retorted. "Like the man who was saddest when he sang, I am

most serious when I assume an air of gayety. At the present moment I am wondering whether my knots held or whether that brute of a man may have wriggled his way free and have followed us over here."

She looked apprehensively at the curtained window. "Could he?" she asked.

"There may be mice to nibble the rope from the captive lion."

For the first time she smiled, albeit a trifle timidly.

"That's right," he said, commending her. "You have nothing to fear. We could not allow ourselves to be caught there, and there was no other way that I could think of."

"We can't leave the man to starve in an empty house," she reminded him.

"But we can phone, without leaving our name or address, to headquarters, and ask them to rescue him. I think I shan't do that for some hours. I have a cousin who is by way of being a distinguished lawyer here. If there is any way out of it, so that his name, which is the same as mine, can be kept from the evening papers in scare head form, I know he will bend every effort to that end."

"I feel relieved," she said. "Not only am I convinced one ought not to keep a thing like that hidden, but I'm afraid of that woman. If she deliberately took my bag and left hers so that I might be caught with that razor, she wouldn't hesitate to accuse me."

"I hardly think she did it intentionally," he returned. "Those bags are so much alike that you made a similar mistake."

"I'm afraid of her," Rhona insisted.

"I don't think you need be any longer," he told her. "And whether the poor lady was innocent or guilty, sinned against or the sinner, we shall never learn."

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"Miss King," he replied, "before I tripped up that policeman I made some rather strange discoveries. On my way to the telephone in the lower hall I came upon her body."

"Murdered?" cried Rhona, aghast.

He shook his head. "She had died of heart disease. There was that blue pallor on her face which physicians call cyanosis. Evidently she had hidden herself as Finneran and I came in, and the nervous strain had killed her. We passed her as we came out. She was lying where she had fallen, but I covered her with a rug. I thought

you saw her, although I tried to hurry you past."

"I did," she exclaimed, "but I thought my nerves were playing me tricks, so I said nothing."

"On my way back to the upper library I went and looked at the man again. I had thought for a moment it was Curtis Bathurst, who owns the house."

"Was it he?" she cried eagerly. Such a solution would seem a very probable one, she thought.

He shook his head. "No. It was a man of middle age, apparently, but one I had never seen. I know Mr. Bathurst fairly well. I have met him at dinner often, and we belong to the same clubs."

"Did you recognize the woman?" Rhona asked.

"She was a stranger, too," he replied. "In any case, the blueness in her face would make recognition difficult, but I'm reasonably certain I have never set eyes on her. I happen to know that Mr. and Mrs. Bathurst are both at their winter home at Aiken, in South Carolina. I should like to know why a stranger comes to Bathurst's house and permits himself to be murdered there. It's all very mysterious."

"And that appeals to you, doesn't it?"

"Tremendously," he admitted. "When I've seen my Cousin Charles, the lawyer, and have got over the rather disagreeable interrogations by the coroner"—he looked at her closely—"I'm afraid they won't be very pleasant, Miss King—I shall do what I can to help the powers that be. When very young I invented a super-detective who unraveled such things as these very readily. His art can never be mine, but I shall enjoy trying."

She looked at him in perturbation. "But there'll be more than that," she said. "There's the officer to consider."

"I know," he agreed; "I'm not over-comfortable myself when I reflect upon it, but I shall have to acknowledge it and confess I did what I did for the best."

"As a matter of fact, it was all my fault," she said contritely.

"Not a bit," he answered cheerily, and lied in saying it. It was her fault, he admitted. He had long admired her, and the thought of her dragged to a cell by a brute such as he knew Finneran to be, and interrogated while under the spell of terror, and perhaps forced into making damaging admissions, had led to what in the law's

eyes was an unjustifiable attack on a police officer.

He did not regard the interview with Charles Southard with any degree of cheerfulness. And he did not anticipate that he would add to his reputation when the story was made public.

"What shall I do?" she asked. "Would you advise me to see a lawyer?"

"Do nothing until I have seen my cousin," he urged. "If it is convenient, I'll come here to-morrow afternoon between four and five and tell you what he advises."

She wondered why he stared at her so curiously.

"And I wouldn't," he added, "go back to your old style of doing your hair."

"Why not?" she demanded.

"First, because this suits you extraordinarily well," he returned, "and second because a sudden reversion to the old style might be taken by an inventive lady journalist as a sign of conscious guilt. One of them might prove to her own satisfaction that you assumed a disguise for a particular reason and then abandoned it. But the most important reason is that it becomes you so much."

Rhona looked at him in surprise. Her spirits had already risen in the sanctuary of her rooms, and by reason of his comforting advice; she feared that she had betrayed herself as the traditional woman who must, in moments of peril, depend upon the male. She admitted that she had placed dependence on him and admired his calmness in circumstances of great gravity. And yet here he was within measurable distance of arrest, saying that her modish coiffure was exceedingly becoming.

"Why should you care about that?" she found herself asking.

"I'm a man with sisters, and the mysteries of hairdressing and color schemes are not unknown to me." He seemed, she thought, to grow unaccountably confused.

"My eldest sister saw you a little while ago—she came over to hear the Toronto Mendelssohn choir—and said if you only did your hair differently—"

Rhona helped him out. "That I'd look less of the typical schoolma'am! Wasn't that it?"

"Certainly not," he protested. "She said if you arranged it otherwise, as she'd like to do it for you, you'd look positively lovely. I think she must have meant as it's done now."

Rhona looked at him with that bafflingly calm air which seemed as though it arose from a deep knowledge of men and their wiles, but was, instead, merely the expression of her lack of it. Southard would never have believed, for instance, as he gazed at her, that, except for the poet fisher boy of her childhood, he was the only man who had ever paid her a compliment. Seeing her unmoved face, Southard cursed himself for his clumsiness, and wondered what magic would draw from her the smiles he wished to see, or give her eyes that softness that he knew could find its home in them.

For her part she realized now, as she had thought before, that it would be very pleasant to have this man as her friend. For the first time she wondered whether, after all, it was predestined that she should always tread a lonely path. When she spoke she did not talk of hairdressing; her change of subject seemed in a sense as calculated to rebuke him for speaking of this when there were graver matters on hand.

"I shall expect you to-morrow, and I hope you won't disappoint me. I don't think you can understand how this has upset me, Mr. Southard."

"I shall come," he assured her; "but you must promise me not to speak of what we saw to any persons, no matter what degrees of friendship you entertain for them."

She gave a little shudder. "I'm not likely to!" she exclaimed.

IV

So soon as he could next day, Southard called at the law offices of his cousin, only to learn that he was now on his way to Florida for a month's rest. This discovery was most disturbing.

Two hours earlier, at nine, he had telephoned to police headquarters, from a pay station, that in the linen closet of a certain house a police officer would be found bound and gagged. Investigations therefore were under way, and his anchor to windward, his distinguished cousin who had reputation and that mysterious thing called influence, was basking among the groves of Florida.

Reflection had confirmed John Southard in his belief that the position in which he was placed might easily prove serious enough to ruin his career. What had seemed the only possible solution the night before, when the glamour of the girl was upon him and his spirit stirred by Finneran's discourtesy, appeared now to be on

a par with those exuberances of spirit common to college men in their freshman year.

His action had placed him in the sight of any one, friend or enemy, as one opposed to the proper action of the law. He had obstructed the law, and must now confess it and take any penalty that seemed equitable. Not until he walked up Federal Street did he realize what faith he had pinned to the legal acumen of Charles Southard. In fancy he had seen this gray-haired cousin of his sitting back in his chair and taking in every word, and instantly constructing in his orderly and trained mind some action for the defense.

He knew several prominent lawyers with some degree of intimacy, but they were not the men to give him the confidence he would have expected from his cousin. But he knew that it were better to make some move before any action could be started inimical to his interests.

For all he knew, Rhona and he might have been recognized leaving the house and traced to Cambridge. There might have been others lurking in that great dark mansion who would see in him an excellent victim to be offered on the law's altars for their own crimes.

He walked slowly toward that exclusive club whose bay windows gaze over the Common. It would be an excellent place to stay a while and reconsider his course of action. There were not many members there as yet. One hailed him cheerfully from a deep leather armchair at a window.

"How comes it that you are here at this time of day?" the voice said heartily.

Southard came to the man's side and looked at him queerly.

"Morning, Lawrence," he said at length. "I had business and let other things slide."

"What are you looking at me like that for?" the other man asked.

"I'm wondering if you are an answer to prayer or a device of the devil placed in that big chair just to lure me to ruin and destruction."

Lawrence laughed. "The latter, Southard. In a previous incarnation men knew me as Circe. What is it?"

Stafford Lawrence was a man of wealth and position to whom Boston had given the position of commissioner of police. His training had been legal; and as he was a man of good judgment and unswayed by politicians, his tenure of office had been a successful one. Southard had long been a

favorite of his, and he was particularly well affected to those old Harvardians who had excelled, as Southard had done, in a major sport. He was a big man, heavily built, a year or so past sixty, and sufficiently well satisfied with his own correctness of opinion to pass few unhappy hours owing to criticism of his actions.

"What is it?" he asked again. "I don't see you here often, and I'll bet it isn't to gaze into my *beaux yeux* that you've cut your classes."

Southard took a chair and lighted a cigar.

"What I have to say," he commenced, "concerns a crime."

"Then don't pollute the Dorset Club with it," he was told. "I have enough on my official conscience to want to be spared here. Damn it," the commissioner exclaimed, "look cheerful, Southard! Watch the squirrels and the pigeons and the frog pond and the dilettanti sitting among the pleasant east winds. Don't bring your psychological aspects of crime here. I read one of your articles, and that was enough."

"This isn't theory," Southard said grimly; "this is good hard reality, and I'm going to talk to you whether you like it or not. When you were appointed commissioner of police it was a twenty-four hour a day job with no spells of luxurious idleness attached to it."

Lawrence sighed. "You are a stubborn brute," he commented, "and I am not feeling warlike this morning. Get it over and have a game of billiards."

"You have a police officer attached to the force named Finneran. His number is 0684, and he's a tall, reddish man, born at Clonmel, in Tipperary, and was formerly a car driver in Buffalo."

"I had such a man," the other returned, "but you're better posted on his biography than ever I was. Yes, I knew Finneran, but I never learned much good of him."

"You *had* such a man on the force!" Southard repeated. "Haven't you got him still?"

The commissioner laughed. It seemed there was some humorous recollection attached to the incident. "He fired himself at eight o'clock this morning."

"At *eight*?" cried the younger man in astonishment. It was not until nine that he had telephoned instructions as to his release. "Are you sure?"

"I was there," the commissioner reminded him, "so I ought to know." He chuck-

led. "I've heard a number of strange excuses in my time, Southard, but never a fairy story like Finneran's!"

The commissioner's whole body became agitated as he laughed; the memory of the man from Clonmel seemed to entertain him vastly. "His explanation of the cruise down the Charles River certainly beats all I ever had poured into my official ear!

"At daybreak," he continued, "pedestrians crossing Harvard Bridge heard sounds of revelry beneath them. Investigation brought Finneran to light, minus helmet and coat, but contentedly nursing an empty whisky bottle. His craft was the flat-bottomed boat whose habitat is the float at the foot of Otter Street."

"How did he get there?" Southard demanded quickly.

"That's the amazing part of it," the commissioner responded. "At eight o'clock or thereabout on the previous evening Finneran was patrolling Beacon Street from Charles Street to Marlborough Street. Suddenly sounds of rioting were heard proceeding from a house there, and a window opened and a vampire woman besought aid.

"Finneran, ever on the alert to capture dangerous criminals, dashed madly up the steps and captured the vampire in the act of murdering a man. He slipped the handcuffs on her and was about to bring her to the phone, where he could order the patrol wagon, when he was set upon by sundry other bloody-minded villains, stripped of his uniform, and bundled into a closet filled with sheets and towels and so on."

The commissioner looked at Southard with a smile still, attempting to treat the matter in a humorous strain. "My dear boy, you know your Boston! Just consider the unprecedented situation of a female vampire, a bleeding corpse, those reckless scoundrels and the heroic Finneran in the commodious mansion of Curtis Bathurst! It's a thing that would blister the gilt off the State House dome!

"You might alter the course of the Gulf Stream, suspend the law of gravitation, or put the Monroe Doctrine up at public auction, and still keep your appetite, but you could never credit such a story in connection with a Beacon Street house in the two hundreds."

"And why not, pray?" the younger man asked a little impatiently.

"Why not?" retorted the commissioner. "Don't you know there are homes in Bea-

con Street which have housed the same family for three generations? You might expect anything on New York's Fifth Avenue, but not on our Beacon Street. I was born," he added with a pride he made no attempt to conceal, "in that very thoroughfare."

Southard smiled. The other man was very much in earnest.

"As one who was born in Providence," he said, "I respect your point of view and your pardonable civic pride, but I utterly fail to see why crimes should not happen once in a while even on Beacon Street."

"No doubt that would be the Rhode Island point of view," Lawrence conceded graciously, "and I've no doubt it is difficult to impress on a man from another State what we feel here. But let me resume the odyssey of Finneran. I can see you're impatient for it.

"He was brought before me still hugging the empty bottle. There was some comfort, he insisted, even in the smell.

"Let me see, I left him in a linen closet, I think. Hours later, three men, the same I take it that made him prisoner, opened his cell door. He could see only one, but the rest argued about his fate in the corridor. There was one among them, a giant with a deep voice, who was for cutting his throat then and there. Finneran was inclined to think this advice might have been followed but for the intervention of a young and beautiful woman who begged for his life.

"Finally, Finneran broke away and pursued the giant out into the night and dumped him in the Charles after a long and exciting pursuit. The narrative is resumed when Finneran awoke, among the jeers of onlookers from the bridge, provisioned as he supposed for a deep-sea cruise."

"And you dismissed the man because your local pride forbade you to believe such a crime could be committed in such a place!" There was scorn in the younger man's voice. "And yet the papers say your administration has been successful. Didn't you investigate?"

"Not so fast, my young friend," the other cried. "Equal justice for all is my motto, whether for Back Bay or North End. Of course I investigated. I had to. I even went there myself, as I know Mr. Bathurst very well.

"I had the house searched from basement to attic, and there was never a sign to

corroborate that wild story. There wasn't a thing misplaced nor a stain of blood in bedroom or linen closet.

"We were making this search when in came Mr. and Mrs. Bathurst and their daughter, back from Aiken. My godson, Larry Bathurst, is in a nursing home recovering from a sudden illness, and they came back to be with him a few days before they intended."

"Were there no servants in the house?" Southard asked, struck by a sudden thought.

"Their Boston help goes *en masse* to Aiken, and were left to close the place there and come on a few days later. Until then the Bathursts are staying at a hotel.

"The only person who stays there all the time is a former servant who sleeps out, but looks after things from eight till six. She has, I found, a very high character from the clergy of the Church of the Advent, where she goes. She came in and stormed at my men for the dirty stair carpets, and declared but for that the place had been undisturbed.

"I personally went with Mrs. Bathurst over the suspected rooms, and she said they were just as they should be. What better evidence could one want than that?"

"What about the houses next door?" Southard demanded.

"One is empty and the owners are in Europe. We went through it and found an inch of dust on everything.

"The other house is occupied by my dear old friends, Henrietta and Georgina Lownam. It so happens that their butler—a man named Sproat, whom I have known for years and can vouch for—was up all night with raging neuralgia and could not sleep a wink. I questioned him, but he had heard nothing, and was willing to swear there was no unusual commotion next door.

"Miss Georgina, though, said she had heard uncanny shouts, but, as Sproat privately admitted, she is of a nervous nature, given to looking under beds and in closets ere she takes to her virgin couch, and used to hearing strange noises. One must not place reliance on her evidence."

"What do you make of it?" Southard asked at length.

"Genii out of a bottle," the commissioner returned. "Finneran is well known to be a drinker. That's his peculiar fault. He's brave enough, and I don't doubt would search a murderer's house single-handed any

day. I maintain that he was drunk. His cousin, one of my best sergeants, thinks so too, and so do the other men who know about it.

"Fortunately, it escaped the notice of the newspaper men, so there will be no unpleasant notoriety to worry Bathurst. By the way," Lawrence asked, as if struck by a sudden thought, "why do you want to know so much about it?"

Southard leaned forward and spoke with unusual deliberation.

"Supposing I told you that I believe Finneran's statements and actually saw the man lying there with his throat cut and knew it was all true. What would you say?"

"I should ask you for the names and addresses of your partners in crime," the elder man rejoined. "I think that would be a reasonable inquiry, don't you?"

"Partners!" Southard exclaimed.

"Of course," Lawrence returned. "The man with the deep voice who wanted to slit the good Finneran's trachea, his sanguinary companions, and the beautiful female who fell a victim to his manly charms."

"That may be a delusion, for all I know," Southard declared earnestly; "but listen to me, Lawrence—I was the man who tied him up in the linen closet among sheets and pillow slips."

"As a lawyer, I should find myself unable to reconcile his statements and yours." He laughed as though the whole thing were a joke. "I'm not so easily tangled up as all that."

"My dear man," Southard said impressively, "I'm not trying to tangle you up; I'm trying to help you do your duty and get the murderer. There was a murdered man in the Bathurst house, and I saw him!"

"I should think you were trying to evade that game of billiards," Lawrence said, still with an air of levity.

"Nonsense!" Southard exclaimed crossly. "One doesn't make statements like this to pass an idle minute. Let me put it in another way. You've reminded me you're a lawyer. Very well, then, I come to you as a client who by some ludicrous mischance did blunder into the Bathurst house and saw just what Finneran told you."

"I no longer practice," Lawrence answered, lighting a fresh cigar. "I should be compelled to turn you over to some other eminent legal luminary."

Why so singular a stupidity possessed the

mind of one for whom he had always entertained considerable respect almost drove the younger man to despair.

"I'll try again," he said, with a groan. "You've given me cold comfort, both as commissioner of police and a lawyer. Now let me approach you as a friend. What will you do now?"

"Remind you that in my library is a blood curdling collection of short stories published by an enterprising firm and written by you, in which you use with equal skill the knife, the dagger, poison, and bacteria as aids to crime. I should conclude that you were trying the plot of a new story on me."

Southard made a gesture of impatience. "Can't one live down the sins of youth?"

Lawrence went on undisturbed. "I should remind you I had just perused part of an article on criminal psychology which shows you to be familiar with most of the great recent crimes."

"But if I still persisted that these had nothing to do with it at all?"

"If you were any one else," Lawrence said with an air of candor, "I should suspect that you had cruised the Charles with Finneran and drunk of his magic bottle."

"You'd believe me under no circumstances whatever?"

The commissioner was plainly tiring of the subject. It was a form of humor that made no appeal to him. Southard, while at Harvard, had possessed a reputation for the most elaborate practical jokes, and Lawrence dimly suspected that he was in the course of perpetrating another. He did not propose to be its victim.

"I shouldn't believe you, Southard," he said, "under any circumstances. If you wish to give yourself up for murder, it's no affair of mine. People all over the country give themselves up for crimes they've never committed after each big or widely advertised atrocity."

"You'll be arrested; I shall be compelled to do that, and I shall equally well be compelled to make another search of the Bathurst home. It will be uncomfortable for me, irritating to the Bathursts, and hell for you. You understand, of course, that no one would ever believe in your sanity again?"

"I'm not the murderer," Southard exploded. "I was merely one of those who saw the dead man. I can corroborate Finneran's story."

He was not yet anxious to introduce Rhona's name into the story. After all, if Lawrence cast such doubt on the two men, it would affect him little if a girl's name were brought in. And it might in the end be unpleasant for her.

"Southard," said Lawrence, with an air of candor and friendliness, "I'm a lot older than you are, and I've watched your career with interest. You've been a credit to old Harvard, both with your brain and with your brawn. Accept my advice and cut out this tomfoolery."

"Good Lord, man!" the exasperated Southard returned. "What has that to do with it? I tell you as commissioner of police what should interest you if you want to fill your office decently."

"Well, it doesn't!" the commissioner retorted. "You seem entirely to forget that we searched the house directly we heard Finneran's story, and found no trace of anything that would lend color to his fancies."

"Beacon Street isn't a mountain path, but a broad city thoroughfare, patrolled constantly by milkmen, servants, and others. The next door houses were inspected. The locks are all of a special sort and none of them have been forced."

"Every possible entrance has been examined, and there is nothing to tell highly trained men that these murderers of yours have been there at all. You ask me to believe that this band of criminals select the Bathurst mansion of all others in the city to perform a bloody murder, and then clean up everything so that the caretaker could see nothing disturbed when she came back, to say no word about their celerity in disposing of the corpse."

"There were two bodies," Southard interrupted. "There was a woman who died of heart disease by the telephone in the hall."

"You mean Finneran's lady friend, I suppose?" Lawrence rejoined. He was more than ever certain that Southard was seeking his downfall to laugh at his defeat. It would be just like this versatile young professor to make a bet that he would bring the commissioner hotfoot on a wholly false trail.

Southard looked at him in despair. He wondered if every man had, in his verdant past, some such follies as his to prove an obstacle to truth.

"I know nothing of what Finneran saw after we left," he said.

"We!" Lawrence repeated. "I thought you did it all single-handed, and alone!"

"I know nothing of what he did after I left," Southard corrected. "I only know that I saw two dead persons in Bathurst's house."

Lawrence smoked on in silence. When he turned again to the other man, his face had lost its air of good temper; it was plain he was worried by a train of new disturbing thoughts.

"Have you ever met my brother Graham?" he asked.

"I've seen him here occasionally," Southard said, "but I've never spoken to him. Why?"

Dr. Graham Lawrence was a physician with a considerable reputation in his profession.

"I wish you'd run around to Mt. Vernon Street and see him. Tell him I sent you, and want him to back up my prescription that you play eighteen holes a day from now until the snow comes. You new type of professors do altogether too much. When I was at Harvard a professor was a professor. All he did was to study."

"Now you fellows study just as hard as they, and fill in your other moments with society and dancing these modern dances, instead of sleeping eight hours every night of your life. What you want is sleep and outdoor exercises."

Obviously, Lawrence's mood of antagonism was gone, and in its place had come a

very genuine concern. It was true that John Southard lived after the manner of the newer type of scholar, and not like the gentle meditator who had preceded him. Other physicians had warned him of nervous breakdowns ere this.

But no other man had ever suggested that he should see an alienist, as Stafford Lawrence had done. The doctor brother was perhaps the leading specialist in mental diseases in a State that may well be proud of its physicians. The concern that looked from the commissioner's eye said plainly: "I think you are in danger of becoming insane."

Southard hesitated for a moment. It was clear he could do nothing now to bring his friend to a belief that his statements were genuine. He arose to his feet, determined to go to see Rhona King. She was strong and intelligent, and might have suggestions that would be useful.

He held his hand out to Lawrence.

"You are wrong in trying to think I wanted to fool you," he said, smiling, "and I don't think I'm yet in need of your brother's expert help. Some day, when you find out you are wrong, I shall have hard work in trying to prevent myself saying, 'I told you so.'"

Lawrence watched him as he walked across the Common.

"Too bad," he muttered. "Brain overtaxed! That's the worst of these brilliant men; they go off the handle so easily."

(To be continued in the June number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

FLITTING LOVE

If kisses were the whole of love,
And there were nothing more;
If life but asked no toll of love,
And fate forgot its score—
How gladly I would love you then,
For we would kiss and kiss again,
Nor have a thought for morrows when
Our kissing would be o'er.

If pleasure were the goal of life,
With youth throughout the years;
If laughter were the whole of life,
And living taught no fears—
I'd gladly press you to my heart,
As if we ne'er again should part;
But since love's passing brings its smart,
I would not kiss in tears.

William Wallace Whitelock

The Old Clown

NOT EVEN THE CRASH OF A CIRCUS BAND CAN DROWN OUT
THE ECHO OF A BEATING HEART

By Myron Brinig

THE blaring of the band from the adjacent big tent signified to Kentro, the clown, that the evening performance had begun. Razz, dazz, boom! The bass drum thundered, the horns blared out their brassy sounds, the piccolos took to flights among the top notes, the snare drum rolled out an intricate rhythm of pebbled beats.

Kentro moved his head from side to side before the mirror, keeping time with the music. He adorned his face, white as flour, with grotesque crescents of red paint. He fixed a perpetual smile over his mouth, so that no matter how depressed he might feel out there before the crowd, he would still appear to be bubbling over with unconstrained mirth.

Razz, dazz, boom! This was life—this nomad existence, this slicing off thick layers of your mirth, and leaving a slice in every town you visited. Here to-day, there to-morrow! Never time to regret the past, and always a new hope for the future, that bright day after to-morrow!

Every day new faces, new smiles, new scenes—Butte, Bozeman, Helena, Great Falls, Havre, Spokane, Walla Walla, Seattle. There wasn't much time to think. You were forever leaving the old to be on with the new—San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Pasadena. Every day a new year, each instant a new set of sensations! Razz, dazz, boom!

Kentro had not always been a clown. Twenty years earlier he had been a youth full of dogged, masculine energy, with eyes that blazed fire, with muscles like coils of steel. He had been a prize fighter in those days, and he had fought his way up from the ranks until he had challenged the king of his class; but there he had failed. His

heart stopped to think of it now—he had failed. The champion had knocked Kentro out, not once, but twice.

These defeats had broken him, extinguished his pugilistic ambitions. His eyes had lost their fire, his muscles their steel-like strength. All the days of his youth he had wanted to be champion, and then, when close to the summit, ironic fate had pushed him down to the base.

But why think about what might have been? Here the band was playing in the big tent adjacent, and the evening performance had begun. The spielers of the side shows were bawling out the most enticing invitations to the laggard crowds. The small boys were shouting their delight. The elephants were stamping their enormous feet.

Making up in front of his mirror, Kentro saw reflected the efforts of some one who was trying to sneak in through the bottom of the tent. A small, nervous hand slid through the opening below the canvas and felt around precariously.

"Aha!" murmured Kentro.

He rose from his make-up table in order that he might seize the interloper, who entered by degrees, one arm, then another, then a dark, tousled head, then two creeping legs in patched overalls. Kentro grabbed hold of these overalls by their small seat, and lifted a very youthful and wriggling person into the air.

Holding the child thus, the clown looked like a huge, brightly colored macaw with a helpless sparrow in his clutch. The sparrow stared at Kentro in speechless terror. His large, childish dark eyes looked enormously horrified.

"Ho, my youngster!" bellowed Kentro, but not unkindly. "So you've come to see the circus?"

He placed the small boy on his feet, but they were too nervous to hold the little body up. The child plopped down on the ground and fixed a gaze of startled rapture on Kentro.

"And what can I do for you, most honorable young sir?" asked the clown, bowing magnificently.

When Kentro bowed magnificently, it was impossible not to smile. The interloper smiled now—a gorgeous smile of happiness and wonder that seemed to say:

"Oh, how grand you are! How elegant!"

Kentro observed that the little boy was not more than ten years old, but strong and keen-looking. Under the dirt on his face was the complexion of a sun-reddened apple, and his teeth were whiter than Kentro's paint. Looking down upon the boy, Kentro saw himself as he must have looked forty years before.

"I was just such a little animal as this one," he thought. "Tell me your name, and I'll tell you mine," he said aloud.

The boy opened his mouth and gulped:

"I ain't got no name. I'm a norphun. I run away to join the circus. Don't tell nobody!"

"Honest, you run away?" asked Kentro kindly. "And you got no father or mother? Run away from the orphan asylum?"

"Yep," the child said conclusively.

"Well, now, ain't that thrilling? Maybe you want to be a clown like me?" encouraged Kentro.

"Nope," said the child. "Clowns ain't strong. I want to be a strong man what lifts weights."

"First thing I know, you'll be wanting to be a prize fighter," Kentro observed sagely.

"Yep! That's what I want to be—a fighter with boxing gloves!"

"You got ambitions," Kentro admitted. "Had your supper? How'd you like some animal cookies—a kangaroo, or maybe a lion?"

After the child had selected a number of lions, Kentro perceived that it was time for his turn.

"Now, kiddo, here's the cookies, and you go straight back to where you come from—savvy?"

"No! No!" the child cried, with tears in his eyes. "Don't send me back! I want to be in the circus!"

A wild idea took hold of Kentro—an idea that left him warm and full of thrills.

"See here, sonny, ain't you got no father or mother or nothin'?"

"Nothin'," answered the child. "Please, I want to go with the circus!"

Razz, dazz, boom! This was the cue for Kentro to dive into the arena and begin playing with the horses' tails.

"Promise to stay here until I get back," Kentro said excitedly, "and I'll bring you some maple sugar. Now mind you don't run away!"

"I want to be with the circus," repeated the child, daubing his face with the white paint.

"I won't be gone long, sonny," called Kentro, and rushed away.

In the main arena, he looked back once, afraid that the child might disobey him. Then the laughter and the lights enveloped him, and he was a clown, body and soul—a clown who pulls at the horses' tails; who turns startling, dazzling somersaults, and then falls in a heap on the sawdust, feigning death; who drives a goat around the ring in ludicrous imitation of the accomplished equestrian; who takes the most amazing falls and tumbles to amuse the onlookers. The more pathetic his antics, the greater the laughter that reached his ears.

All the while the band blared in his ears, the animals made strange, snorting noises, the tight-rope walkers slid disdainfully up and down a tight steel wire before his gaze, the airy acrobats dived and swam like oddly colored flying fish above his head. This was life—this whirligig of ludicrous limbs and voices, this animalistic sequence of tricks and feats! The noise of it, the sight of it, the smell of it! Ambrosia to his appetite, solace to his soul! Razz, dazz, boom!

He burlesqued the ballerinas, rising deliriously on his toes and collapsing convulsively on his back. He limped, he coughed weakly, pretending that he was ill, and the vast crowd laughed sympathetically. Even the animals gazed at him askance, as if he were something outside of the range of elemental circumstance. He made his exit nimbly, swiftly, and dashed into his tent, breathing deeply, perspiring.

All of a sudden he stopped short. In one corner of the tent, curled up like a little puppy, was the child he had forgotten.

In a rush of emotion, he gathered the little boy up in his arms and kissed the large, drowsy eyes.

"You want to be a circus performer, eh? Well, sonny, you shall! You'll be my own little boy. Would you like that? Would you like me to be your daddy?"

"Yep!" The child smiled his sweet smile. "You be my daddy!"

"You be Sonny Kentro, eh? Daddy will make you a strong 'un—strong like the men who lift weights!"

The boy laughed in happiness; but he was tired after his thrilling, adventurous day, and soon he closed his eyes in slumber.

Many a night, speeding on to the next town, Kentro had dreamed of holding some one like this close to his breast. He had been a lonely man. Often, as he played before the children who howled in delight at his antics, he had wished that he might have a child of his own; and now his wish had come true.

II

It was time to pack up for the next town. In a few minutes Kentro had removed his make-up and taken off his pantaloons. He wrapped the sleeping boy in his overcoat, and from a distance he watched the circus city collapse into formless heaps of canvas.

He loved to watch the tents going up in the early morning—camps of hilarity, pitched to the weird, picturesque oaths of the circus followers; but it was at night, when the exciting city suddenly evaporated into the lonely plain, and the lights expired one by one, that Kentro loved his life the most. It was like plucking out a star from the heavens and blowing its green-white magic into extinction. Life was like this at last, when eternal sleep stamped out your breath and left only the hulk of your former matchless functioning.

Kentro turned away from the site where the circus had been. With the boy held tightly in his arms, he approached the long line of cars that moved the great make-believe city with its Noah's ark of life. He loved his people, all. He would make this child, this new son of his, love them also.

Sonny Kentro, they called him, and he proved to be a livelier chip than the old block.

"What 'll we make him?" asked Boss Rocker, the genial, busy proprietor of "Rocker's Rousing Tent Shows—seventy-five cents sees all in comfort." "What 'll we make him—an acrobat? A snake

charmer? A clown? That's it—a clown like his famous papa!"

"No!" chirped up Sonny, now fourteen, and growing fast. "I want to be a fighter! See my muscle? Watch!" Slowly, laboriously, in the manner of a precocious Sandow, Sonny held up his arm, to show how it swelled in cords and channels as he slid it on his elbow. "See? Some muscle, hey?"

"Prize fighter, eh? Well, Rocker's Rousing Shows never did have a good boxer. What d'ya say, old Kentro? Let's make a boxer of Sonny!"

Kentro was thinking back to the time when he had had pugilistic ambitions; and as he glanced at his adopted son, an expression of fear stole into his eyes. Suppose Sonny should fail as he had once failed? Ah, doleful contemplation!

"As long as he sticks to the circus, he can be a boxer if he wants," Kentro agreed; "but nothing professional. It's a hard game to buck against, the boxing profession. Why, once I—"

But he cut himself short, lest he should belittle himself in those youthful eyes that searched his own.

Sonny stretched himself resentfully like a gamecock suddenly come of fighting age.

"Why can't I be a professional, if I got the stuff?" he demanded of the old clown. His dark eyes blazed furiously, and he clenched his fists. "D'ya think I want to be a circus performer all my life? Huh!"

Kentro winced at this. It was the first time he had ever heard Sonny speak with contempt of the Big Tops.

"Why, Sonny," said old Kentro gently, "you know that some of the finest men and women in the world are circus people. It isn't like you to talk that way!"

"But, dad, I want to get somewhere! I want to get settled some day!"

"Settled?" Old Kentro did not understand that word "settled." He wrinkled his eyes curiously, and rubbed the top of his head in a puzzled fashion. Then he achieved a smile. "Sonny, you're joking with me! Sure, you are! You're joking! Why, who wants to be settled? Only old maids and office clerks. Why, boy, we've got the big tents in our blood! Here to-day, there to-morrow—that's our motto! Settled? Don't make me laugh, Sonny!"

The look of pain in Kentro's eyes showed that he was far from laughter. Sonny patted his old clown of a dad on

the shoulder reassuringly. He did not long remain at odds with this whimsical old fellow who had taken the place of a father in his life.

After all, the old man had been darned good to him. What times they had together! What times to the razz, dazz, boom! There were the swift, quickening dawns, when old Kentro would rouse Sonny from slumber, and gently shake him into wakefulness.

"Up, Sonny! Up, if you want to see the tents go skyrocketing!"

Sonny would jump into his clothes, to watch the great canvas palaces become inflated with a sizzling make-believe of fantastic colors and sounds.

Ah, what thrill was comparable to this, what activity of mankind so romantic? To wake up of a rainy morning in a strange place, to behold strange sights and to smell new odors, to stand by while the hordes of circus followers forced the great canvas plants into sudden growth! This was the life for a man—always on the go, never stopping on the hilarious, magical road to eternity!

This was all fine and magical and extraordinary to Kentro. It appeared to be fine and magical and extraordinary to Sonny. Then why "settled"—why?

III

EVERY day there was a routine for Kentro to go through. There was a long walk in the morning, to keep Sonny hard and fit.

"Fighters need a lot of walking," said old Kentro. "There's nothing like walking to put you in trim, Sonny. Arms loose, legs wabbly—not too much energy—that's the way! Now, trot. Not so fast—take it easy. Don't tire yourself. Did you see those movies of Georges Carpentier out running? Did you notice how easy he took everything? And well I remember old Jim Jeffries—there's the boy who used to do a lot of walking. Nothing like it to keep one in trim!"

After the walk, there was the parade through the business section of the town. The parade always left Sonny restless and depressed. Dressed in tights and toga, he drove a chariot incongruously along Main Street, while the onlookers gaped and stared. How Sonny envied them all! Like so many circus people, he was forever fascinated by any one rooted to a single spot.

He knew that old Kentro was different; but Sonny wouldn't remain in a circus all his life—not he! Just as soon as he could fight well enough to take on some professional, he would shake the dust of the circus from his heels and attach himself to something real. Circus life might do for such as old Kentro; but for himself there must be a more ambitious place, a great day on the calendar!

"Oh, I hate these parades!" Sonny groaned. "I hate them! All these staring gawks making you out for a freak! To them, you're just an animal. They don't understand that you're human. Oh, I hate parades!"

"I'll speak to the boss about letting you off, Sonny," old Kentro volunteered. "Maybe it'll be all right if I can get some one to drive a chariot in your place."

But Sonny balked strangely at being let off. He hated parades, and yet the look of firmly rooted townsfolk, so different from himself, held a strange fascination for him. Some day he would be firmly rooted—married, perhaps, to some beautiful girl, with children of his own. So he went on parading through Main Street, driving his chariot over the cobblestones, searching the crowds, wondering about the faces that belonged to homes.

Home! He had never known what it was to have a house to go to after the day's work. His earliest memory was an orphan asylum, a rough, heartless place. The circus, with its motto "Here to-day, there to-morrow," was never a home to him. That was why he balked strangely at being relieved of his parade duties. That was why he continued to search the rows of gaping faces.

After the parade, there was the sparring with old Kentro. This was the most enjoyable part of the day. Sonny loved the feel of boxing gloves on his hands, the quick, nervous energy of it all. He loved the way old Kentro instructed him in the clever art.

"Now, Sonny, you know better than putting down your guard like that. Don't be a target! Cover up! Cover up! Don't let me get at you! That's the boy! Be a fox, a clever boy, a young Lavigne! Use your brains and your feet. Speed does it. Look out! You put your guard down again. Your nose is bleeding. Why, you'd be a mark for a professional, letting your guard down that way! Mix 'er up! That's the

ticket! Faster! Faster! Wait! Wait! You're getting a little too good for me, boy—a little too good! Remember, I'm an old man. Remember you're younger and stronger!"

Old Kentro would throw himself on the ground, exhausted, while Sonny bent over him anxiously.

"Did I hurt you, dad? Did I hurt? I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hit so hard. Here, let me wipe off your face. I am getting pretty good, ain't I? I'm ready to go to work for the boss now. I'll make money for the boss. My own little side show, huh? But you're hurt, dad. You're gasping like an old woman. Here, let me get you some water. I can punch, huh, dad? Oh, I'll be a champ some day!"

Some day the boy would leave him—unbearable thought! Cruel thought! Never to box with Sonny any more! Never to feel the sting of Sonny's gloves on his face! Never to walk with the boy, to spar with him! Cruel, unbearable! How could life go on? Never to wake the boy early in the morning:

"Up! Up, Sonny, if you want to see the tents go skyrocketing!"

Never to watch with Sonny the circus city dissolving to the ground and being carried away to the next town! Hard! Cruel!

"It's as if he were my own son," old Kentro would often think. "I couldn't love my own flesh and blood more!"

After the strenuous work-out, it was time for Kentro to make up for the afternoon performance—to paint his face white as flour, to decorate his cheeks with crescents of red. Kentro in make-up, flaring and whimsical in his pantaloons, was ever a magnificent spectacle to Sonny. The boy could never forget the first time he had seen the old clown. It was a memory that would never die.

"There ain't no clown like you in the world, dad. You're the most wonderful clown on earth!"

"And I'm a pretty good dad, too, ain't I, Sonny? I'm the sort of dad you like to have around, huh?"

"You said it!" Sonny would answer. "You're the finest dad in the world!"

Then, while Kentro would go through his ludicrous paces, much to the edification of the crowds, Sonny would be at work in the dressing tent, punching the bag furiously, reaching forth eagerly for the day

when he would be a personage himself—Sonny Kentro, the great fighter!

IV

THE first of the great days arrived. Boss Rocker began to cash in on Sonny's strength and cleverness. He gave Sonny his own tent to perform in, his own side show, before which a leather-lunged spieler bawled in enticing invitation:

"Come on, boys! Meet the greatest lightweight the world has ever known! The great Sonny Kentro! Ten cents admission! Ten cents to see the greatest little scrapper of them all! One hundred dollars free to any one who can go three rounds with him. Think of it, gents! Think of it! One hundred iron simoleons free to any guy who can stand up to him for three rounds! Ten cents, a little dime, may make you one hundred dollars richer! Who'll be the first one to put on the gloves with Sonny Kentro? Who'll be the first one?"

Proud as a prince, finely molded as Apollo, beautiful as a god, Sonny would stand by waiting for his first adversary. Great, lumbering youths would come forth impetuously to take the dare; and great, lumbering youths would leave the side show sadder and wiser, with bulging eyes and scratched noses. Not one of them could reach Sonny. He played with them as if they were toys. Each newcomer was taught a lesson in the art of boxing. They came to jeer and conquer; they passed in admiration of their conqueror.

Razz, daz, boom! Here to-day, there to-morrow! Sonny Kentro's fame began to grow. They began to talk about the young marvel who traveled around with Boss Rocker's Rousing Shows. His tent was besieged by ambitious youths and by girls who could not take their eyes away from his splendid strength, his gay manliness. Watch him! There he goes! Did you ever see such grace, such precision? They can't touch him, I tell you!

What an uppercut! Where did he get that science, that foxiness? Where did he get that bearing, as cool as a cucumber? His dad was a clown? Now what do you think of that? There he goes. Watch him! He'd make some of those professionals look sick, I tell you!

Anxious days for old Kentro! After his own performance, he would rush over to Sonny's tent without taking time to re-

move his make-up, and would watch the youth in action. He was astounded. Not even in his best days, surely, had he shown anything like this boy! And yet he was always on pins and needles, for he feared that Sonny might come to harm, might tackle some one too strong for him.

"Sure you're not hurt, Sonny? Everything all right? That was a big fellow you tackled to-night. You want to look out for these corn-fed huskies!"

Enveloping the boy in a dressing gown, Kentro would hurry him to the train, where he would see him into his berth.

"Good night, Sonny. Tired, eh, boy? Here, let me fix that pillow under your head. Don't think you were always this big. Why, Sonny, I used to lift you off the ground and rock you to sleep. My, but you were a tiny fellow! Remember that first night when you fell asleep in my arms?"

"Aw, dad, cut out the baby stuff! And look here, dad—when am I going to meet some of the big guys, the professionals? This circus stuff is all right for you; but where am I getting, I'd like to know? Where does my future come in?"

"Now, Sonny, you getting impatient again. You're still a boy—a child. Eighteen—what's that? When I was eighteen, I was hanging on to my mother's apron strings. Patience, boy! Patience does it."

"Patience, dad? Look here, I've been patient long enough. I'm tired of moving from one town to the next—always moving. I want to meet some of the big guys. I want to be settled!"

There it was again—*settled!* The boy wanted to be *settled!* Old Kentro turned his head away at the word. It unnerved him, made him fearful of the future. Cruel, heartless word, *settled!*; but that was youth, always yearning for something it had not, utterly impatient of coddling, rushing hotly into the furnace of life—heedless, cruel youth!

"Would you want to leave your old dad?" the circus fool asked, letting his hands linger on the boy's wavy black hair. "Because you know, Sonny, this old clown ain't ever going to leave the circus. He's going to die with his make-up on!"

"Oh, dad, I'm sorry! Where would I be if it weren't for you? In an orphan asylum? Ugh!" The boy shuddered in his berth. Then, suddenly, he straightened

himself tensely, and old Kentro could see his eyes flash and his fists double up. "Just the same, I don't get much out of this life. I want to be somebody big—somebody you read about in the newspapers. I want to get to the top!"

Cruel, heedless youth! Old Kentro could not hold on to the reins much longer. He could not curb his hot-blooded young steed for many more days.

"Sonny, look—they're taking the tents down. Look how the lights go out one by one! Remember how you used to love to see them taking it all apart and putting it together again? Look, Sonny!"

"Damn it!" exclaimed the boy. "This ain't the life for a man who wants to get ahead! This fly-by-night circus! This third rate tent show! Damn the taking apart and putting together! Damn it all!"

I tell you, old Kentro was hurt. He was badly hurt.

V

If you've got the stuff, fame will come to you, like the foreign potentates of old, bearing rich gifts to place at your feet. Fame will find you out. This may be fairy talk; but any one with common sense will tell you that fairy tales are true tales.

Sonny would have told you so on the night when Max Welsh, the fistic promoter, approached him with a contract. Welsh had been watching Sonny as the boy dazzled and thrilled the onlookers. As if aware that fame was out there in the crowd watching him, Sonny battled as he never had before. As if aware that fairy tales are true tales, he achieved a symmetry, a perfection of telling science that he had never before attained. Apollo in motion he was that night—an Apollo of the Big Tops.

Max Welsh was a wise guy. He did not tumble before false alarms. He did not pursue phantoms feverishly, with a contract in one hand and a roll of currency in the other. Long years of ringside experience had ripened his wisdom and sharpened his instincts.

After the performance, Welsh cornered Sonny and spoke words of encouragement to the boy.

"Now I may be wrong, kid. You never can be sure in this world; but I think you're ripe for your professional debut. In case you don't cotton to Park Avenue lingo, I'll interpret. I think you're ready for the big pickings, the long green kale. What d'you

say we join hands and make some of these would-be cauliflowers eat our dust?"

Sonny could have cried, but he did not. Sonny could have danced a wild fandango, but he did no such thing. He merely said:

"Yes, I'm ready. I'll try to do my best. Yes, I'll try!"

But his heart was awl with sensations indescribable. His imagination was busy constructing grand, luxurious castles in the air. He knew that Max Welsh was one of the cleverest managers in the game. He knew from the newspapers that Welsh had "made" more fighters than any one alive. Ah, fame and fortune kneeling at your feet and bearing rich gifts!

"I'll get my father," Sonny said. "He's only a clown, but he adopted me. I'll have to see him about this, I guess. Don't go away, please."

Sonny burst into old Kentro's tent, trembling and dizzy with tears and emotion. He grasped the clown's hands and babbled unintelligible things. Finally Kentro made out: "Max Welsh! He wants to sign me up! Max Welsh! Come on!"

Old Kentro shrank visibly, like a bird withdrawing into its gay, colored feathers. He was suddenly very old and broken. Yet he murmured:

"I'm glad, Sonny. I'm glad, boy!"

Even as he negotiated the distance from his tent to Sonny's, the world reversed itself before his eyes. Twenty years passed before him in an instant, and he lived over again in that brief space the intensely intimate and affectionate associations he had had with the boy.

"Come on, dad! He's waiting for us to sign up!"

"I'm coming, Sonny!"

He dragged himself along, and before him he saw a scaffold that leered greedily for his mind and heart. His lips trembled under the great, hilarious smile he had painted upon them. They laughed at the world, while his heart ached with pain.

"I'm glad, boy!"

He felt Max Welsh grab his hands and shake them; but it was the merest, outward feeling. They were cold—cold as the hands of a dead man. He saw that Max Welsh had a sympathetic manner and a good-natured smile; but it was only the merest mechanical view of Welsh that he had. In reality, he saw long, dismal years ahead—and then death. He heard Welsh speak, but his heart heard only this:

"I want to be a strong man what lifts weights. Damn this fly-by-night circus life! Settled—settled!"

"We'll meet Kid Flynn first," Welsh was saying. "Flynn is the man to meet, so as to get noticed in the lightweight division. If we lick Flynn, we can begin talking turkey to the champion. Flynn ain't what he was, but he still packs a wicked crusher. The wise guys think a lot of Flynn, but after watching you, Sonny, I don't think he'll last five rounds."

Marvelous man, out of whom marvelous words so easily passed! Great personality! Regal sport!

"I can lick Flynn," said Sonny calmly. "I know I can lick Flynn."

"Now don't be overconfident, young man. Overconfidence has spoiled a lot of 'em!"

Wise man! Marvelous mind!

"Now, Sonny, you'll have to leave this circus right away and come on with me to New York. I want to get you known to the press. You can't remain with the circus any longer. You got to come to New York with me."

New York!

"Sure I'll go," replied Sonny, trying to speak calmly, though his eyes blazed with excitement. "I'm ready any time—Max."

He said "Max" a little in awe, a little in fear. Had he dared too far?

Max did not seem to notice.

"Got to get you known, kid," the promoter said. "Got to show you to the boys. We leave for New York to-morrow. Better pack to-night—right away. I guess you're through with the circus."

"Sure, Max, sure!"

And then Sonny seemed to recall, after long, blissful æons of triumph, that Kentro was at his side—Kentro, the old clown.

"Dad, you're coming, too. Dad's my trainer, Max, even if he is just a clown. He's been helping me along a little bit; but I'm too strong for you now, huh, dad? I punch too hard for you, huh?"

"Too hard," murmured Kentro.

"But, dad, you got to come to New York with me. Show you the sights. Take you up the Statue of Liberty and the Woolworth Building."

"I—I don't know," stammered the old clown. "I—just—don't know," he repeated, hardly above a whisper. "I don't think the boss could spare me."

Max knew. Glorious Max!

"Sure, come on!" he said encouragingly. "Sure, do you good! Sure, old man!"

"I don't know. Leavin' the circus like that—the boss wouldn't like it, Sonny. You know the boss wouldn't like it."

"Devil take the boss!" cried Sonny. "What's the boss got to do with it? Who's the boss, anyway? Dad, you don't seem to understand. I'm going to New York to fight Kid Flynn. Dad, get that through your bean. To hell with the circus! I want to get known! I want to be somebody. Who knows you in a circus?"

"I know how it is, Kentro," sympathized Max. "Kind of leery of leavin' the old stampin' ground, eh? Well, you'll forget. Just wait until your boy gets in the ring at Madison Square! You'll forget!"

The spectators that night were loath to let old Kentro go, he was so funny. The children jumped up from their places as he passed.

"Come back, old clown! Come back!" they shrilled after him.

They could not know how, in the darkness of his dressing tent, he threw himself down upon the ground and wept. Poor *Pierrot*! It was dreary any way he looked at it. Staying meant losing Sonny; leaving meant the end of this nomad existence with the motto, "Here to-day, there to-morrow."

He heard Sonny's footsteps and picked himself up quickly, feigning to be very busy. Sonny burst in.

"Packed yet, dad? Ready? Here, let me help you. Now what did you go and pack your pantaloons and make-up for? They just take up a lot of room. I should think you'd be glad to get out of this rotten circus life, this fly-by-night—"

"Don't, Sonny! Don't talk that way—not now!"

"Ain't it great, dad, about Welsh taking me to New York? I knew I'd get there. I'll be great some day! Ready, dad? Welsh is waiting for us. Oh, come on! Come on!"

"I'm coming, Sonny—only I can't run as fast as you can. I'm coming. Wait for me. I'm not as fast—"

VI

You must remember that he had been a clown for forty years. Then you will understand why he is so ill at ease in the New York hotel where he is staying with Sonny. You will understand why he is so uncomfortable and shy before strangers; so for-

lorn and crushed-looking as he walks along these menacing, bristling streets, curious and alien to him.

"We're in Duluth to-day," the boss writes, "and the boys are busy getting everything ready. Pretty soon we'll be getting ready for the parade. We all do miss you, sure. Evelyn, the snake charmer, says the rattlers ain't behavin' nohow since you left. Maybe they got so used to you they're restless. You sure was the best clown I ever had. Say, do you think you'll ever come back? Sacred Heart to-morrow, and the day after Minnetonka. Remember me to Sonny, and we're all rooting for him to beat Flynn."

"We're all rooting for him to beat Flynn!" Yet very few of the spectators at the Garden know Sonny, or whence he comes. They see him enter the ring, a trifle pale, with large, dark eyes, and they do not know him for the fighter he is; yet they applaud him sympathetically. He is young and nice-looking. He deserves a hand.

But one man in that audience cannot put his two hands together. Old Kentro sits there nervously and cannot applaud. As Sonny comes into the ring, he seems to see a child looking up at him and saying:

"I'm a morphun. I run away to join the circus. I want to be a strong man what lifts weights."

Well, now you are strong, and this is your greatest weight to lift!

"If he should lose," thinks old Kentro, "he will come back to me, and I will have him forever and ever. If he should lose, he will be my own boy again, and we'll go back to the circus. If he should win—"

Whang! The two, Kid Flynn and Sonny, pop up from their seats and take range. Kid Flynn is an old hand. He coolly surveys his youthful opponent, none too eager to begin taking chances. Sonny is not so careful; he is restless, impetuous, anxious to start. He dances about, and, when Flynn refuses to give him an opening, he bores in of his own accord and surprises the veteran with a neat jab to the jaw.

"Ah!" exclaims the crowd.

They're at it now. Watch them go! Ah, Sonny strikes with his left, and catches Flynn in the stomach. Flynn doubles up. Sonny learned that trick from old Kentro. Old Kentro was a battler in his day.

As Flynn doubles up, Sonny flogs the veteran's ribs. Swift, impetuous, he fol-

lows up one blow with another. The crowd begins to take life, man to man, one torch igniting the other.

"Why, that boy can hit! Why, he's good! He's good!"

"If he should win," thinks Kentro, "he won't be mine any more. He will belong to all these people. He will be theirs."

Rat-a-tat-tat! Sonny's gloves are vitalized as if by magic. He's a find, a wonder boy. What ancestor filled him with this zest for the ring? What progenitor flavored his blood so artfully and poured fire into his veins?

Flynn is slow, methodical, waiting for this green one, this ambitious boy, to wear himself out. He does not seem to realize that his opponent has served a long, arduous apprenticeship in a side show. He does not know what brains have molded this boy into a sizzler, an indomitable, fearless conqueror.

He's one of the cautious, patient ones, is Kid Flynn. He waits through the first three rounds for Sonny to wear himself out. Rat-a-tat-tat! The boy is here, there, everywhere. Youth bubbles in him, life renews itself with every blow. You see he was born one of the unfortunate ones, in an orphan asylum, and this is his revenge on the world.

"Oh!" and "Ah!" cry the spectators.

They came, sophisticated and wary; they are lifted out of themselves by this manifestation of youth and power. Sonny Kentro's muscles ripple over his body in continuously easy movement; no strain, no stress, no puffing. Watch him follow Flynn around the ring in the fourth round, coming, coming, coming! Like a flash, he is on top of his opponent and beating him, right, left, right, left.

"Everything to gain and nothing to lose"—such is Sonny's thought. He has been reared in a careless atmosphere, an environment of great hilarity and rigorous enjoyment of the casual. "Here to-day, there to-morrow," has been his motto. Ah, the freedom of him, the zest, the power!

"Oh!" and "Ah!" cries the crowd.

Have you seen the glaring grace of a panther in a circus cage? Have you noticed the way the acrobats swim and flow in long, graceful lines up there, from bar to bar, from arm to arm? Have you wondered at the quick-stepping, intrepid grace of the bareback riders, as they leap artfully from one steed to the other? Have

you seen the clowns turn dazzling somersaults to relieve themselves of their pent-up humor, their bursting mirth that must be articulated in motion?

All these tricks, these quicknesses, these faultless movements of grace, are this young fighter's—all taught him by old Kentro, who has been a clown for Butte and Helena and Bozeman and Great Falls and a hundred other towns.

Courage? Has he courage? You perceive, with alarm, that your boy has forgotten himself for the moment. He is only human. He has let down his guard, and Kid Flynn, cunning, an old hand, fearing death to his career, has taken advantage of the heart-breaking moment. Kid Flynn jolts Sonny wickedly to the jaw, and the boy falls in a heap to the mat.

Old Kentro forgets now that a young fighter's defeat will mean an old clown's victory. His boy is down, his boy is enduring agonies of pain and humiliation. How think of himself in such a moment? How pity his useless old self when that beautiful boy is down, helpless, in agony? What would a clown's victory be worth when his own boy is beaten, struck down, in pain?

"Oh, he let down his guard! He should never 'a' done that. I warned him! I warned him!" Old Kentro moans from his place at the ringside, forgetful of his own future, thinking only of the boy.

Courage? You know the boys who haul up the tents in the early dawn and pull them down late at night—how they fight it out through rain and snow and hurricane. There's courage! Sonny is of that breed. Do you think that blows fazed him in the old days? Remember the lumbering, corn-fed youths who thrashed down upon him with their solid, phlegmatic fists? He was not afraid.

He lifts himself perkily on one hand, and at the count of eight he is back to his business, with fire in his dark eyes.

Disaster cannot thwart him; blows cannot stop him; his antagonist's greater experience does not discourage him. For the blow received he renders many back in payment. For the blow that sent him spinning helplessly to the mat, he returns a dozen stingers, his knuckles burning pain into Flynn's flesh, branding the veteran fighter into the corral of oblivion.

Merciless youth! Hot, tempestuous youth, ever striving for achievement, ever

hopeful of acclaim! Kid Flynn feels it now. He reels, he staggers, his doom is written.

Rise, rise from your seats, one after the other, like seals on a rocky island, aware for the first time of nearing danger! Rise, rise, seat after seat, row after row, in popping, ascending lines. The end nears. The old man is failing fast! The new man is conquering!

Cheer, cheer madly! Show your lust for blood, your greed for stunning thwacks, your eagerness to see death overtaking the other fellow! Pile up, one mad, whirling mass of human forms, and yell at Sonny to finish it, to put Flynn out of his misery! Growl, leap to your feet, fountains of enthusiasm spurting to the rafters!

You are all mad, merciless hunters, with your quarry cornered and reeling in his death throes! You are all Sonny's winning out and beating your opponent to a pulp! For the moment, you are all conquerors!

The moment is spoiled. From Flynn's corner a sponge is flung into the center of the ring. Spoiled! You will miss the intense pleasure of beholding him unconscious! You will not see the last, most agonizing blow of all!

Down, down into your seats, like steel helmets bobbing below the shrapnel fire. Down, down, seat after seat, row after row. It is over. It is done!

VII

OLD Kentro tried to get to his boy; but he was too old, and the others pushed him aside, wedged him away. He saw them carry Sonny off on their shoulders.

"Sonny! Sonny!" he shouted, but his voice was a flimsy whitecap in the heaving ocean of sound and movement. They were taking Sonny away from him forever—he knew it! Life was treacherous, and robbed you of all that you held most dear. He had felt it for a long time. Now he knew it most painfully.

Sonny would go on and on, plucking new triumphs, sleeping in beds of roses, surrounded by new faces, new friends; and he, old Kentro, was a clown. He could not keep pace. He must fall behind, with only his memories for company. All these people had taken his Sonny away from him. He had seen Sonny borne away on their shoulders, laughing like an enraptured demon.

When he arrived at the hotel, after wandering the streets for hours, Kentro found Sonny and Max celebrating over the earliest

editions of the newspapers. Sonny read the reports of his sensational victory with dancing eyes and gleeful interpolations. There was not a mark on him, not a scratch. He looked cruelly triumphant and newly formidable. So immersed was he in the papers that he barely nodded to Kentro when the old clown entered.

"I'm proud of you, Sonny! Proud of you, boy!"

"Thanks, dad. Listen to what this paper says, Max: 'At no time was Kentro in trouble. He was always master of the proceedings.' I'll say so!"

"You sure opened their eyes!" Welsh proclaimed, rolling a nervous cheroot from one side of his mouth to the other. "We won't have much trouble getting matches now. I'm going to take you to England with me."

"Oh, I'll polish off those Cousin Jacks without extending myself," said Sonny glibly. "You bet, I'm happy!"

"Did you say you was going to England, Max?" faltered old Kentro.

"Me and Sonny," answered the manager. "And believe me, we're goin' to clean up over there. Sonny is headed for the championship as sure as you're alive!"

"England!" said old Kentro in a hollow voice. "Well, I don't think I'll be able to go to England."

"What did you say, dad?" asked Sonny absently.

"I don't think I'll be able to go to England, Sonny."

"All right, dad. You can take it easy now. You're getting old, you know."

Old Kentro tried to smile. He tugged at his coat and pulled forth a letter. He read part of it again:

You sure was the best clown I ever had. Say, do you think you'll ever come back?

"I'm going back," he announced after a few minutes.

"Back?" Sonny asked. "What are you talking about, dad?"

"I'm going back to the circus, Sonny."

Kentro looked a little ashamed. He dreaded Sonny's reply.

"Well, dad, do what you like; but at your age I should think you'd want to stay retired. You're getting on, you know. I can always let you have enough—you know that."

"Thanks, boy! Thanks, but I guess I'll go back to the circus. It's my life.

Good luck to you, Sonny! Maybe you'll drop in on me every now and then." He turned away from the boy suddenly, with drooping shoulders. "Now that you're settled, Sonny, I guess I'll catch up with the show at Sault Ste. Marie."

He wanted to be coaxed to stay. Sonny could coax in such a lovable manner!

"Well, dad, I'm sorry you're going," said Sonny, rising to shake the old man's hand. "We'll sure miss you—hey, Max?"

"Sure will," said Max.

"And I'll miss you, Sonny. Take good care of yourself; and—and write me. You'll find my route in the *Billboard*."

"Max, remind me, will you, to look up dad's route every once in a while? The trouble with these damned circuses is that they're always moving, and you got to date your letters away ahead."

"I—I think I'll get packed," whispered old Kentro.

VIII

He caught up with them at Sault Ste. Marie. Boss Rocker embraced him.

"Welcome home, Kentro! How'd you stay away so long?"

Evelyn, the snake charmer, kissed him and wept. All the acrobats shook his hand, and the fat lady presented him with a new make-up outfit.

He arrived in time for the evening show. It was wonderful to be back, and yet he dreaded going into the old tent—dreaded to be alone in a place filled with phantoms of memories. He would look around for a familiar figure—and look in vain. He tried to steel himself.

"I mustn't think of him. I must forget. I mustn't think!"

Thank God, there wasn't much time to think. New faces, new smiles, new skies—Wenatchee, Kalamazoo, Sioux City, Aberdeen, Multnomah. You were forever leaving the old to be on with the new—Butte, Anaconda, Deer Lodge, Livingston—change here for the Yellowstone! Each day a new year, each instant a new set of sensations. Razz, dazz, boom!

Kentro moved his head from side to side, keeping time with the music. He adorned his face, white as flour, with grotesque crescents of red paint. He fixed a perpetual smile over his mouth, so that no matter how depressed he might feel out there before the crowd, he would still appear to be bubbling over with unconstrained mirth.

"I must not think of him," he told himself on that very first evening in Sault Ste. Marie.

Yet he could not stamp out that lithe, clever figure, that young Apollo whom he had reared as his own son. He tried to keep time to the music, but after a while his eyes were flooded with tears, and he buried his head in his arms.

A curious flapping of the tent startled him. He looked around, and saw a head squeezing in through an opening in the canvas—the head of a child, who finally triumphed over the limitations of space. He was quite a little boy, with dark hair, and with large eyes that remarked the magnificent spectacle of old Kentro wonderingly.

The clown looked dumfounded. His eyes were playing him tricks, surely! He rose from his make-up table, and a mist blotted out the child; yet when Kentro reached forth a trembling hand, he touched flesh. He lifted the little boy in his arms and stroked the long, wavy hair.

"Please, can I go with the circus?" asked the child, after a moment.

"No! No!" cried the old clown. "You'll leave me when you grow up! You'll go away! You'll break my heart! Go away! Go home!"

"Please, I ain't got no home. I'm a norphun."

How like Sonny the child was! How warm, how thrilling he felt in Kentro's arms!

"What could you do in a circus?" the old clown asked. "You're such a little fellow."

"I can be a clown," said the little boy; "a clown like you."

A wild idea took hold of Kentro. He trembled with the exaltation of it.

"You ain't got any father or mother?" he whispered.

"No, sir—I'm a norphun. Please, may I be with the circus?"

Razz, dazz, boom! This was the cue for Kentro to dive into the arena and begin playing with the horses' tails.

He placed the child on a chair, and in an instant he was young again—young as spring, as first love, as the twilight stars.

"Don't run away!" he cried to the boy. "When I come back, I'll bring you some animal cookies. And your name is—is—Sonny Kentro. That's your name, and you're my boy—mine! You're going to travel with me! Won't that be fine? Don't run away! I'll soon be back!"

Old Dog Tray

SHOWING HOW A LONG COURTSHIP CAME TO AN UNEXPECTED ENDING

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

MURCHISON ascended the hill to the house that Saturday afternoon as usual, his pockets filled with presents for the children, and under his arm a box of Scotch kisses for Gina. His obstinate, lantern-jawed face showed all the satisfaction possible to it. This was always one of his happy moments, when he could almost fancy that he was coming home.

He had nothing else but Gina and Gina's children. It would not be true to say that he could not have lived without them, for he was not that sort. He would tenaciously have gone on living if he were translated among savages.

But the welcome he got at Gina's house was ineffably dear to him. From a distance he saw them all on the lawn. His face would have brightened, had that been possible to his dour visage, and he would have hastened his step, if he had not been already striding as fast as he could. Then one of the small boys saw him, and came rushing out of the gate.

"Here's Old Dog Tray!" he shouted joyously.

Gina called him back sharply, and came herself to welcome Murchison; but let her be ever so sweet and friendly, it was obvious by her overanxious manner and her flushed cheeks that she knew he had heard, and that she felt guilty.

Murchison was by no means delighted with the name. Quite the contrary—he was deeply affronted. He distributed the presents, but instead of handing the invariable box to one of the children, with the invariable joke—"Here are some Scotch kisses for your mother. You'd better give them to her"—he merely set down the box on the bench. He would have been glad to destroy the offensively arch object. He made up his mind never to bring another

such box; and his mind, when made up, was an imposing thing.

"Old Dog Tray!" he thought. "That's how she sees it, eh?"

It rankled; it galled.

He conducted himself as usual. He played "red rover" with the children, dodging miraculously, lean, solemn, dignified even in his agility. He sat down to tea on the veranda, and when offered a slice of lemon he asked little Rose, according to precedent:

"Now do you think it would do more good to my complexion than harm to my disposition?"

There was his customary plate of buttered toast, and he ate three slices, as usual. No one but Gina, who knew him so well, would have suspected that he was hurt and angry.

She knew, though, that the only way to deal with Murchison was by rough outspokenness. He both dreaded and adored plain speaking. He was never happy until a thing was made clear and explicit, yet he shied away from any attempt at intimacy. He had, so to speak, to be seized by the neck and forced to listen.

She waited until the children were all in bed, and they had the sitting room to themselves, before she tackled him.

"Robert," she said, "I suppose you heard the silly thing Roddy said?"

"Aye!" said he, and at once began to sheer off. "Roddy's getting to be—"

"I'm sorry you heard it," she said gently. "It was just my own little name for you, and I wanted to keep it to myself."

There was magic in the woman, sewing in the lamplight. Even the few gray hairs in the shining flood of brown were dear to him, and so was the uncertain quality of her voice.

"Never mind it," he said.

"But I do mind it, Robert," she protested. "I'm sure you don't understand."

He looked nothing less than mulish, and she saw with despair that he intended not to understand. This must not be. The unclouded admiration of her faithful Robert was the breath of life to her. She looked long at him, but he smoked his pipe, refusing to raise his eyes, and at last she rose.

He glanced up quickly enough when he heard the piano. He liked nothing better than a song. Never did Gina touch his heart more surely than by her music. She was a slender, gracious little woman, still pretty. She often fancied that it was Robert who kept her young, that his sturdy refusal to admit any change in her arrested the course of time. She smiled over her shoulder at him, and began:

"Old Dog Tray, he is faithful;
Grief cannot drive him away.
He is gentle, he is kind,
And you'll never, never find
A better friend than Old Dog Tray."

She sang it touchingly.

"Don't you see, Robert," she said, "that it's really a beautiful thing to think of you?"

"Yes, Gina, I've no doubt it's as you say," he answered, and she was satisfied.

She didn't know that she had made a terrible mistake, that she had done irrevocable harm. All the time she sang, he had endured torments. Suppose the children heard, or the servants? He was not Old Dog Tray! He would not be!

II

ALL the way over on the ferry Murchison deliberated the matter, and his slow wrath mounted high. He was not angry at Gina, for he could not be; what enraged him was his own position. He firmly believed that he possessed a fine Scotch sense of humor, but he was utterly incapable of laughing at himself. The idea of being sweetly sung to as Old Dog Tray had for him no comic appeal. On the contrary, he was obliged to admit that to some extent he was Old Dog Tray, and it was intolerable. "Kind" he was pleased to be, but "gentle" he was not, and "faithful" was no word to apply to a man.

He looked back over this affair. He had met Gina when she was a young girl, a lively, witty young thing. He had fallen in love with her, and had set to work in a de-

corous way to court her. He had come over to Staten Island twice a week. This had seemed to him sufficient evidence of devotion, but when he observed that other young men brought her presents, he did likewise. Books and music were what he preferred, and he was willing to go as far as candy, but he would rather have died than be seen carrying flowers.

Privately he thought this American lavishness very foolish. His idea was to save up to get married; but he realized that if he wished to marry Gina, he must please her. So he tried, but while he was engaged in the process, she married Wigmore.

It was then necessary for Murchison to show that he didn't mind that in the least, for he was horribly proud and sensitive. Obstinate he kept on coming twice a week with books and sweets, and Wigmore became attached to him. He was really more interested in Wigmore's conversation, and in the children, than he was in Gina, although he didn't know it.

Gina had changed astoundingly. She had ceased to be lively and witty, and had grown sweet and a little vague. Murchison was too obstinate to admit any change in her, however—or in himself, either. He refused to think at all.

When Wigmore died, and poor Gina had so much trouble about money, and was so ill and grief-stricken, she became real for Murchison again. He had felt a passionate tenderness for her. He had done everything in the world for her, though well knowing that such disinterested devotion might make him appear ridiculous.

After a seemly interval of three years he had suggested marriage. Gina asked for time to make up her mind. He thought that quite reasonable and proper, but it occurred to him this evening that five years was longer than necessary, even to the most cautious woman. It wasn't as if he were a stranger. She had seen him twice a week for nearly twelve years.

He was suddenly convinced that he was a fool. Other men came to see Gina when he wasn't there. He heard the children speak of Dr. Walters, for instance, as if he were a familiar friend. The same thing would happen again.

No, it wouldn't. Perhaps grief could not drive him away, but other things could.

When he returned to his boarding house, he wrote a grim letter to Gina, in which he said that she must make up her mind at

once either to take him or leave him. At once, mind you; he refused to wait for an answer longer than six months.

He appeared again on his usual evening, and didn't mention the letter. Gina knew that he never would mention it until exactly six months had passed. He was quite as usual, and only one small incident perturbed her. After dinner, when they were alone, he said:

"Will you not sing 'Old Dog Tray' for me, Gina?"

"But—" she said.

"I'm thinking it does me good," said he.

While she sang, he sat there in wooden silence, smoking his pipe.

"Well!" he thought. "It's a queer world, to be sure! Who'd think that at my age I'd come courting, and the object of my affections a woman thirty-eight years of age? I'm forty-one, and here I come courting like a lad!"

This made him grin. It seemed to him a very humorous idea, and when, later in the evening, it recurred to him, he was obliged to grin again.

"Why do you smile, Robert?" asked Gina softly.

"Well—well, it's nothing, as you might say." But he could not banish the grin.

"Do tell me!" she implored. "It's so seldom you find anything funny. Please share it with me, Robert!"

"I'm thinking you might not like it," he said, with a chuckle.

"Oh, but I shall, Robert! Tell me!"

He burst into a shout of laughter, so that his lean face was creased with long lines.

"What will you say, Gina," he said, with difficulty, "to Old Dog Tray going courting, and you a woman of thirty-eight?"

She sprang to her feet.

"Robert!" she cried, quite pale with anger.

"It's the funniest thing—that's come to my mind—this long time," he said, almost helpless with laughter. "Think of it!"

"How dare you?" she said. "How dare you insult me like this?"

His jaw dropped.

"Insult you!" he repeated. "What's this, Gina? Insult you! Why, my dear—"

"You think—" she began, but sobs choked her. "You're laughing at me because I'm thirty-eight!"

"But I was not, Gina, my dear! Only it struck me comical for two old bodies like us to be courting."

"I'm not courting!" she cried. "Don't dare to say it! And I'm not old!"

"Of course, properly speaking, we're not old," said he. "But—"

"Every one else thinks I'm a young woman!" she sobbed.

"Don't you believe it, my dear," he said earnestly. "They may say so to your face, but behind your back no one would call a woman of thirty-eight—"

"Stop!" she cried hysterically. "Don't call me a woman of thirty-eight again!"

He was very much distressed.

"Don't be thinking I mean anything against your—your personal attractions," he said. "You're one of the neatest, best-looking women of your age—"

"I hate you!" said Gina.

"That's an ill-considered remark," replied Murchison, growing red, "to a man who's been your true friend for twelve years and ten months. I was only trying to tell you that I think as much of you to-day as I did when you were young and pretty."

"You needn't go on, Robert," she said, frigidly. "I appreciate your friendship, but I have never known a man so lacking in tact."

"I don't doubt you're right, Gina," he observed, also frigidly. "It didn't occur to me that a mature and sensible woman couldn't endure to hear her age mentioned."

"It's the way you did it—laughing like that."

"I wasn't laughing at you—only at myself, for courting you."

"Please say nothing more," she interrupted sharply. "There are other—other people who don't think it's so absurd to— to like me."

Now, well as Gina knew him, there were certain traits in her Robert which had eluded her. She never knew that by this simple remark she had mortally insulted him. She was comparing his twelve years and ten months of devotion to the false flattery of that Dr. Walters.

"Aye!" said he. "I've no doubt it's as you say."

And with that he took his leave.

III

ON the last day of the six months Murchison presented himself before Gina, and without embarrassment, and also without fervor, requested to know his fate. He was greatly displeased with Gina's conduct on this occasion. She wished to be indefinite;

she wished neither to take him nor to leave him, but to keep him in reserve.

"You know how fond I am of you, Robert," she said.

"No," he replied, "I don't. My question was just, as you might say, to determine that point."

"Sometimes I think that, on account of the children, I shouldn't marry again," she said tentatively.

"That's for you to say. You ought to know," he remarked.

"I suppose at my age, I ought!"

He bowed stiffly. There came to Gina the recollection of what Dr. Walters had said. He had assured her that she was like a young girl.

"You've never grown up," he had told her. "You never will."

"I'm afraid, Robert," she said, "that I never could make you happy."

He turned away, and was silent for some time.

"That's for you to say," he repeated. "You ought to know your own mind."

His chief purpose was to avoid showing how horribly wounded and bereft he was. So valiantly did he conceal his hurt that Gina herself was offended and angered by his high spirits.

"I believe he's glad!" she thought. "He's delighted to get out of it!"

She forgot entirely how she had lain awake at night, planning some way to tell Robert that she couldn't marry him. On that night she lay awake marveling at his treachery. She had decided that he didn't really care.

On the evening of his next visit she had Dr. Walters there. She had the doctor's superior devotion on exhibition, and encouraged him to be incredibly gallant and tender. He did his part admirably, but Murchison failed her. He was pleasant, unusually pleasant and talkative, and he gave no more sign of being a disappointed suitor than if he were her grandfather. He made a most favorable impression upon Dr. Walters.

Before he left, he did something which enraged Gina.

"Will you not sing 'Old Dog Tray'?" he asked blandly. "It is a great favorite with me."

She refused, but Dr. Walters joined his entreaties to Murchison's, and she had to yield. So she sang the simple old ballad with burning cheeks; and while she sang

it, there sat Robert, smoking his pipe in wooden silence.

IV

He went home that night in a queer mood. He was hurt and he was angry, but depressed he was not. He went up to the room he had occupied for years and years—a room which, like his face, showed no trace of the spirit that possessed it. He sat down to unlace his boots and put on his slippers. When that was done, he filled another pipe.

"Perhaps it's just as well," he reflected, with a philosophy Gina would not have appreciated. "A wife's a very unsettling thing. Now I'll go on just the same!"

And, if you will believe it, the next Saturday afternoon he bought a box of blocks, and a doll's cradle, and the familiar package of Scotch kisses, and with perfect composure set off for Staten Island.

"There's no reason at all for a quarrel," he thought. "To be sure, I've nothing against the poor woman. I'm not one to change."

There was a heavy fog, and the boat was late. He stood downstairs, close to the gates. He was in no sort of hurry. Indeed, he rather enjoyed the little stir of excitement caused by the fog.

He heard people about him saying it was the worst they had seen in years, that a small boat had been run down a few hours before, that steamers were held up. He liked the din from the bay, the whistles low or shrill, the clamor of the bells, the blasting wail of a great foghorn.

There was, unfortunately, no way in which he could verbally express his scorn for this excitement, and his own miraculous coolness and detachment. He could look it, however, and more than ever he assumed the aspect of a wooden image. For some reason this inspired the confidence of a fellow traveler.

"Do you think there's any danger?" asked an anxious voice.

He turned, intending to answer somewhat loftily, but he was utterly disarmed at sight of the questioner. Indeed, he at once felt that there might well be danger. He removed his hat with ceremony.

"Nothing to worry about," he assured her gravely.

She was a tall and rather thin girl, very dark, with a wonderful rich color in her cheeks and great, serious eyes. That seri-

ousness was the thing which first attracted him—that, with her sober dress. It took a second glance to reveal that her dress was shabby and her seriousness tinged with something forlorn; to say nothing of her being very young and very pretty.

Now Murchison was a cautious and practical fellow, by no means given to talking to strangers; and he decided that he would not look at the girl again. A boat had just come in, so that he really had something justifiable to stare at.

There came first the inexplicable persons who run and sometimes shout; then motor cars, and streams of people, and drays and trucks with vociferous teamsters. It was what happened every half hour or so, all day long, yet it had the thrill there always is at the end of a journey, no matter how short. And now, belated and fog-haunted, the incoming ferryboat might have returned from the Antipodes.

The traffic, the shouts, the procession of people, ended abruptly. Then the gates were pushed open, and the new swarm crowded forward, as eager to be carried south as the others had been to rush northward. Murchison was perfectly aware that the girl kept beside him, although he didn't turn his head. He could lose her easily enough by crossing over to the smoking cabin; but he had to let a truck go by before he could do so, and, without quite turning his head, he saw her, hesitant and dismayed, looking after him.

Long after he was settled with his pipe he remembered her dark face, her troubled eyes, something alien and tragic in her, and he felt uneasy, almost guilty. He knew it was nonsense, the particular sort of nonsense that he most disliked. He was sorry he had not bought a newspaper to distract his mind.

A bell clanged; the boat slowed down, and the throb and jar of the engines stopped. A great many people rushed to the windows, as always happens, and this gave Murchison the chance for being most notably Scotch, and not stirring. His sharp ears caught all the wild and confused rumors and surmises of those about him. He felt incipient panic in the atmosphere. He was grimly amused, until it suddenly occurred to him how silly women were—how very, very silly a young girl would be, with no Scotsman beside her!

He got up and crossed to the other cabin. That was not ridiculous; it committed him

to nothing. He entered the cabin and sauntered through it, looking with an eye casual but very keen at the backs of the people crowded two deep at the windows.

That girl wasn't there. Perhaps she had rushed upstairs. If so, she might stay there, for he had gone quite far enough.

He pushed open the door, and stepped out upon the forward deck. No denying that the fog was unpleasantly thick, and that ominous and immense shapes appeared half hidden behind it. The bells and whistles on every side made a diabolic clamor. The boat was drifting silently, and the fog concealed even the water on which it floated; and yet, with nothing visible, he was in a crowded and noisy world, menacing, incomprehensible.

He saw her out there, one hand on the railing, her young face in profile. She had, he thought, such a forsaken air! She was so lovely and young! She put him in mind of the beloved and half forgotten creatures in the romances he had read in his young days—heroines brave, gentle, and beautiful, for whom a man could die gladly. She was shabby, she was frightened, she was alone, as a heroine should be. There was a halo of romance about her dark head.

But still Murchison was entirely Murchison. He could have leaped overboard and saved her from the sea more easily than he could address one single word to her. He was eager to speak to her, to reassure her, but it was not possible.

Her anxious glance, turning in his direction, fell full upon his face.

"Do you think anything's going to happen?" she asked, as promptly and simply as if he were an old friend.

"No, no!" said he. "But with these crowded ferries they're very cautious."

He came over to the rail and stood near her. He had an absurd desire to remove his hat and to stand bareheaded before her innocent youth; but he resisted this preposterous impulse, and spoke in his driest way. He gave her facts about the shipping in this stupendous harbor, quoting figures, reports. He had an uneasy feeling that he was tiresome, and probably making mistakes in his statistics, but he was so desperately occupied in not looking at her that it distracted his mind.

"I find it an agreeable trip," he ended abruptly.

He was obliged to look at her then, to see if his talk had wearied her, and he observed

a strange expression upon her downcast face.

"I'm so afraid of the sea!" she said faintly.

"But this is only a bay—" he began.

She glanced up.

"My father was a captain," she said.

"He was drowned when I was a baby; and my brother was drowned in the war. So— you see—"

"Yes," he answered gravely. "I see!"

He did not try to express sympathy, he did not speak one reassuring or consolatory word. He stood silently beside her, neither seeking nor evading her attention, simply being his own uncompromising self. Never in life had he tried, never in life would he try, to make a favorable impression upon any one. He took it for granted that she knew all the compassion, interest, and respect he felt; and she, on her part, accepted him without question.

"Do you think we'll be kept here long like this?" she asked.

"It's impossible to say; but there's nothing to be alarmed about."

"I'm late," she said anxiously. "You see, I've come all the way from Philadelphia this morning, and I got a little mixed up. I was expected for lunch, but it's much too late now."

"Won't the people—your friends—wait?" asked Robert indignantly.

"They're strangers," she said. "I've never seen them. I'm going as a governess. I was recommended to Mrs. Wigmore—"

"Mrs. Wigmore!"

"Oh, do you know her?" the girl asked.

"I am acquainted with the lady," said Robert, in so curt a manner that she was abashed.

She fancied that he regretted having been drawn into conversation with the governess of some one whom he knew. She flushed a little, and turned away her head. She expected him to make some excuse and to leave her; but he did not. He stood where he was, filled with the most unaccountable chagrin and disappointment.

She was going to Gina! She would see him there, see him as Old Dog Tray! He felt as if some ineffable happiness had been snatched from him. He felt suddenly middle-aged and preposterously displeasing.

An instant ago he had really believed that this marvelous girl was interested in him, friendly toward him, even glad of his company. Well, only let her see him climb-

ing the hill with his arms full of bundles, only let her see him playing with the children, being treated with slightly condescending affection by Gina, only let her see Old Dog Tray in his natural habitat, and he would never again be anything but that in her eyes!

"I'll not go," he decided. "I don't doubt they'll do well enough without me."

But, thought he, what good would that do? He knew so well Gina's fatal lack of discretion, her shocking habit of confiding in every one. It was impossible to believe that she could have a governess in the house twenty-four hours without telling—even boasting—about her Old Dog Tray.

"The devil!" he said, dismayed at the prospect.

Then he realized that he had spoken aloud, and he apologized earnestly to his companion. He was surprised and relieved to see her smile—not plaintively and sweetly, like Gina, but with a wide, youthful smile that was almost a grin. With a faint shock he realized that while she was undoubtedly an angel, she was also a delightful human being.

They were suddenly upon a new footing. They began to talk with miraculous ease. They exchanged names. She said she was Anne Kittridge, and instead of being, as he had half imagined, an isolated phenomenon, she had a mother and a home in Philadelphia.

"I've never been a governess before," she said. "I've never even been away from mother. I hope—do you think I'll get on with Mrs. Wigmore's children?"

"Aye," said he, "I've no doubt you will."

"But I'm not beginning very well," she said, "being late like this."

"And no lunch!" said he. "I'd forgotten that. It's—let's see—it's nearly three o'clock."

"I don't care," she said stoutly.

He did, though. He was greatly worried.

"Well," he said, after much thought, "I've a box of sweets here. Very poor things they are for the teeth and the digestion, but I dare say they're better than nothing."

He set to work to unwrap his neat package. As he did so, the box of blocks fell out upside down, and the contents scattered over the deck.

"Oh!" said she. "Were they for your little boy?"

He did not answer until he had picked all the blocks up. Then he straightened himself, with a slight frown.

"I'm a bachelor," he said. "They were for the child of an old friend." And he added resolutely: "A very respectable, middle-aged body."

The boat had started again, but they didn't notice it. Miss Kittridge was steadily and happily consuming Gina's Scotch kisses.

V

It would be impossible to any chronicler to describe all that took place in Murchison's soul during that brief trip. The easiest way is to say bluntly that he fell in love, and for most readers that will go a long way toward an explanation; but one must bear in mind the character of the man, his frightful obstinacy, his outrageous pride, and the matter-of-fact romanticism of his secret heart.

He was amazed, delighted, awed. He knew that he was in love; he knew that this was the real thing, for which he had always been waiting. Lack of self-confidence was not among his faults. He hoped, he believed, that if he could have a clear field, he would have a fair chance with this matchless girl. She liked him, she trusted him; she was amused by his jokes, interested in all the information he had to give. If he could keep her from seeing him as Old Dog Tray!

"I won't have it!" he thought fiercely. "I won't have this spoiled by such a thing!"

The boat bumped its way into the slip, and a lurching procession of people came up to the gates. Miss Kittridge wished to join them. She glanced anxiously at Murchison, but he didn't stir. The gates opened, and the crowd began to hurry off.

"Hadh't we better go?" she said.

"Very well," he answered absently, and off they went.

"Mrs. Wigmore told me to take the North Shore train," she began, but Murchison grasped her arm firmly and led her to the waiting room.

"Miss Kittridge," he said, in a peculiar voice, "you'd better not go there."

"But why?" cried the startled girl.

"Well," he replied, "well—mind you, I've nothing to say against Mrs. Wigmore. I've a very high opinion of her. She's a very pleasant, respectable woman; but I advise you not to go there."

"But I must! She's expecting me; and where else can I go?"

"Go back to your mother in Philadelphia," said he.

"I can't, Mr. Murchison. It was my own idea to go out and earn my own living, and I'm certainly not going home before I've even tried."

"There's a train every hour," said he. "I'll go with you, and I'll explain to your mother."

"Explain what?" she protested, overwhelmed with astonishment.

"It'll be better explained to your mother," he told her. "You're too young."

The doors were opened, and a new crowd was pressing through them. Murchison joined the stream of people, leading his reluctant and protesting companion back on board the ferryboat.

VI

GINA was shocked and hurt beyond measure. She had thought it very strange of Murchison to write to her from Philadelphia, to say, without explanation, that he would be there for a week or two on private business. How unfriendly of him to have private business after all these years!

After that he didn't come near her for three months. He telephoned now and then, and said he was very busy; apparently he did not notice how grieved was her manner.

And then, after all this, what happened? A thing incredible—he telephoned to her one afternoon and told her that he had been married that morning. She could never, never forgive such brutality. He might at least have given her a chance to marry Dr. Walters first!

"Where are you now, Robert?" she inquired sternly.

"We're in New York for—"

"Then you must come to dinner to-night with your—bride," she said.

"But—" he began.

"It seems to me that is the least you can do," said Gina, and he was defeated.

Naturally she had Dr. Walters there for dinner, and naturally she was charmingly gracious and kind. No denying that she was impressed by the youth and prettiness of Robert's wife. The fact that a well bred, lovely creature certainly not more than twenty-one or twenty-two had been willing to marry him forced her to admit that she had not appreciated him.

"You have a wonderful man in Robert," she gravely assured his wife.

"Isn't he?" said Anne. "There's no one like him!"

Then, of course, she had to look at him, to see if he was still there and still as wonderful. He was. He met her glance, and they smiled at each other with sublime confidence and understanding. Gina found it a little hard to go on talking.

"Do you know," she said brightly, "such a curious thing happened! A friend of mine wrote me about a girl in Philadelphia, and I sent for her to come as governess for the children. She told me that she'd arrive on a certain day, but she didn't come, and I never heard another word from her. I wonder if you know the name—Kittridge?"

"Philadelphia's quite a large place," said Anne hastily.

"Of course," Gina assented. "Now do tell me about yourself and Robert. Was it romantic?"

"Oh, very romantic!" said Anne, in no little confusion. "It was—I think it was—unique!"

There was a pause, and Robert came directly toward them.

"Will you not sing, Gina?" he asked blandly.

"No, thank you, Robert," said she.

But Dr. Walters came to entreat also.

"Please do, Gina!" he said, with all his honest admiration reflected in his beaming face.

"Sing 'Old—'"

"No!" said she, so vigorously that he was startled.

He turned to Anne.

"You should hear her sing 'Old—'"

"Please don't ask me!" she cried.

"Of course not, if you don't wish to," he said gently; "but upon my word, Mrs. Wigmore's rendering of 'Old Black Joe' is—"

"It was 'Old Dog Tray' I had in mind," observed Robert.

"That's a hateful, silly song!" said Gina. "I can't endure it. It's—the whole sentiment is false. There are no Old Dog Trays!"

Robert's hand fell lightly on her shoulder, and she turned to look at him. Something that she saw in his face brought the tears to her eyes.

"There are old friends, though, Gina," he said, "and nothing drives them away!"

AMONG THE MARGUERITES

AMONG the marguerites we lay
That unforgotten night in May—
A carpet all of daisies white,
And white the moon went up the night.
Your breast was whiter far than they;
And, underneath the blossomed bough,
Have you forgotten, darling, how
We lay and kissed the world away
Among the marguerites?

The world was all of blossom made
As we lay in it there and played;
The moonlight like a silver noon
Outside the apple blossom shade:
My blossom still, and still my moon,
Among the marguerites!

Some day, when hand in hand we rove
Those shining meadows up above,
Where every flower is a star,
Will it not seem again we are
Among the marguerites?

Richard Le Gallienne

The Dream That Told

HENRY McELDON'S STRANGE GUARDIANSHIP OF HIS FAMILY TREASURES

By Thomas H. Uzzell

FORGET! The word evokes a crowd of incongruous associations, from tragedy to farce, with all that lies between. The absurd helplessness of the moment when you open the lunch basket, only to find that you have forgotten to put in the salt! The grotesque instant of forgetting the name of your best friend in the midst of an introduction!

The subconscious, the domain of forgotten things, is a kingdom in ourselves which we do not rule. The will is powerless to retrieve a thing once lost in the limbo of unconsciousness.

Henry McEldon's hair had whitened, his spare, long-limbed body had grown thinner, the jerky, furtive movements of his long fingers had become more tremulous, during the years he had sat in the tall, carved chair of the shadowy library, guarding his family treasures. And here he sat when Lora returned from Europe on this chill autumn afternoon, his decanter of sherry at his elbow, a gas radiator glowing at his gray-spatted feet.

Every piece of furniture, every bibelot, every jewel, was in its place. With infinite patience McEldon had hidden and rehidden all the smaller possessions not needed in the meticulous routine of his life, until his memory of them seemed like an elaborate structure.

The room was crowded like a museum with Gothic chests, heavy French *armoires*, and uncomfortable state chairs. In it the owner had come to function as if the room itself were a huge brain, of which he himself was the central and controlling cell.

Upon his cloistered solitude the young woman, having tiptoed to the door, burst with cheeks glowing and eyes dancing with the joy of her return. The flood of amber light from the stained glass table lamp sil-

houetted his pinched aquiline nose and lustrous Vandyke beard against the dull red curtain beyond.

"Father!" she cried, tripping to him, and enveloping his clerical-looking figure with her eager arms and her billowy furs full of clean, frosty air.

He responded to her greeting with a show of warmth, and carefully secreted the volume before him in a drawer of the table. Before he could focus his mind to answer her many questions, she was flying toward the door leading into the corridor, to find her mother. Then he saw the young woman pause and return, and heard her say abruptly, with a curious mixture of diffidence and determination:

"Father, I have some bad news."

Involuntarily he stiffened, for he thought of his jewels. Bad news! He could not imagine what Lora would say. Was it something that would threaten his possessions? Had he not foreseen every contingency? He opened his thin lips, staring at her in mild confusion.

She spoke with nervous haste:

"Blythe's business is failing. He found his European customers unable to place any more orders, owing to the adverse rates of exchange. He has lost contracts. Orders were canceled right and left."

Henry McEldon gazed at the worn black surface of the table without replying. A faint, undefined agitation seized him. He remembered that this was a pass he had dreaded. He felt a warm, fragrantly gloved hand press his fingers.

"Blythe is going after orders in South America," the girl went on. "He needs more credit. Father, we have decided to sell our earrings."

A door opened in the depths of the house. Lora Stoddard's mother had risen from her

afternoon nap. With a cry of eagerness, the girl kissed her father's pale cheek and fled toward her mother's room.

For a moment he sat perfectly still. His thoughts were focused on a small black bed of velvet, upon which lay two dagger-shaped earrings of beaten gold, their two large diamonds blazing with blue-white fires.

Leaning back in his chair, he grappled with his problem. These diamonds did not really belong to him. They should have been delivered to Lora on her wedding day, but he had kept them. They belonged to the wondrous structure of his memory.

He felt Lora's disappointment, but she was an obedient and trusting child. Was it not his responsibility, as curator of the McEldon collection, to keep them safely—for her? He had kept them. The thought of some day having her, or perhaps her husband, demand them had ever been a quietly nourished anguish. Had the time now come?

Hot waves swept over his frail body. The more he tried to think, the more confused he became.

He rose, tremulous, and began nervously to pace the floor, struggling with rising fears. He would have to produce the diamonds. Well, he could do that much. Lora had said that her husband was coming for dinner. Blythe Stoddard was an easy-going man. He had never spoken of the diamonds; but no doubt he expected that some day they would be turned over to Lora.

Well, Henry would at least reassure them as to the safety of the jewels. He would step over to the—but just where *were* the diamond earrings? Queer! He started to smile at the absurd impossibility of forgetting so important a matter, but sobered instantly. It couldn't be!

II

THE room swam about him. Nausea dizzied him. He felt light, as if he were floating in a thick gray mist that strangled him. He clutched the cold marble of a statue to keep from being borne away. After what seemed an age, he stumbled heavily to his table and sank down, burying his drawn face in his arms.

The light laughter of his daughter in the upper corridor, with her mother, alarmed him. He wanted to stop them, to shut the door against them; but that would

rouse their suspicions. There were still a few seconds left. He pushed himself to his feet, and, gasping painfully, stared about him, as if to find some outward aid to his memory.

At the opposite end of the room the soot-blackened stones of the great chimney piece, surmounted by its ancient coat of arms and rusted sabers, taunted him—*him*, the last of the McEldons! Near it stood the carved figure of a medieval knight, gleaming with faded gold—there was a fold in the swirling draperies where, tradition said, he once hid from his enemies. McEldon's heart leaped—no, they were not there. Above the knight hung unlighted paintings—they were good hiding places at one time, but now no more, for the maids moved them in cleaning. The huge Italian marriage chest, standing like a sarcophagus in the center of the room, had a secret drawer in the carved base. His illuminated breviaries and missals were there, but no—no jewels.

The soft footsteps were nearly at the door. He lifted his head. His eyes, narrowed with tense thought, swept across the gallery, with its crumbling Gothic fragments and silver sconces crowded against the banks of solemn books. In vain! Little hiding places long forgotten, like moribund cells quickened by a rush of blood, flashed through his mind. The earrings—gone! The thought suffocated him. He swept his trembling hand across his brow. "My memory—gone!" he groaned.

Lora and her mother, seeing him, paused, startled.

"Father, dear, what *is* the matter?" The young woman hurried to him, a hand outstretched. "Father, you haven't—*lost* the earrings?"

"No, no!" He gestured with a show of irritation. "They're in the house somewhere, of course. After you went away, I put them away carefully."

"But they're in the safe, father, with the other jewels," Lora said, but her face was blank.

He looked up suddenly, his lips speaking in spite of himself.

"They were in the safe—yes, but I took them out."

"You took them out? You took them out?"

The stupid repetition roused him.

"Yes, I took them out." He spoke with irritation. "I was afraid they might be

stolen. I hid them somewhere—in the house—”

His voice trailed away until he was whispering to himself.

Sinking into a chair, her mild, unblinking eyes staring at her husband, Mrs. McEldon complained:

“Henry, I was afraid you’d do something like this some day. You know I have told you many times that you have no need to be hiding things.”

The girl, still motionless, fixed her gaze painfully on her distraught parent, thinking. Though well acquainted with his magpie-like trait of hiding things, she had laid it and his forgetfulness to his age, and had loved him just the same. Now she was compelled to see him in another light. In his blue eyes staring helplessly at her she saw a strange resentment, a hard secretiveness, with a glint of greed. Could this be her father?

She remembered all that she had heard of her grandfather, Bullard McEldon. Though she did not remember him in the flesh, she had built up for him, too, a strangely tender and deep enthusiasm. The Pirate of Wall Street, his contemporaries had called him; but, despite his notorious profanity and hard-hitting business methods, he possessed, inside his big, shapeless body, a queer spark of the collector’s genius.

His tastes, to be sure, ran mainly to monster pieces, heavy with grotesque carving that delighted him with its malicious or reverent ingenuity; but from time to time, on his vandal tours in Europe, he picked up exquisite examples of antique glass, a parchment marvelously illuminated, a delicate bit of ivory, and now and then a gem of unusual value and beauty. His was the real adventure of finding and capture. Possession meant little to him; he sold and gave away freely.

On one of his trips he came upon a pair of earrings in the private museum of a wealthy old German jeweler in Munich, named Barenburg. The dagger-shaped settings of hand-wrought gold, with delicate overlapping filigree chains of the same metal, were originally found among some Roman excavations. Barenburg mounted at the center of each a large pear-shaped Transvaal diamond, and inclosed them in a thin square case of pale yellow parchment. Captivated by their barbaric splendor, Bullard McEldon, forty years before,

had parted with a goodly share of his fortune to secure them.

When the old pirate reached home his son, Henry McEldon, presented him with a granddaughter. Bullard roared his surprise, thumped the timorous father on the back, and promptly deposited the thin yellow case bearing the old German crest on the silken bassinet, saying:

“Give it to the young lady when she marries!”

III

LORA STODDARD felt her own share of blame for the present mishap. As her father grew older, feebler, and more forgetful, she and her mother had indeed become concerned over his manner of caring for the family treasures. She had thought of selling some of the jewels, but only once had she mentioned it. Her father was thrown into a state of feverish excitement which lasted for days.

When they warned him of the danger of theft, he changed the music room adjoining the library into a bedroom, and slept with a revolver on his bedside table. With Blythe Stoddard’s help, an electric burglar protective device was installed, and the gleam of copper fire extinguishers was added to the somber tones of the room. These things done, the jealous guardian was left to sit by his great Italian table in the library, the glow of the gas radiator at his feet, poring over faded French and German works on furniture and jewels, dreaming of new elaborations to the cathedral of his memory.

In spite of all this, Lora Stoddard never once dreamed of the possibility of his actually removing the jewels from the safe. Now, however, that her own magnificent white bulwarks against misfortune were missing, and disaster impended, she cried with alarm:

“Father, are you sure the earrings are not in the safe?”

“They are put away—” he began, following the formula of habit.

He paused, walked over to the big safe behind his table, knelt, fumbled tremulously at the combination, swung open the heavy door, and drew out several trays covered with gems which smoldered and flashed against the black velvet.

Lora and her mother bent over them. Suddenly the girl straightened up with a gasp.

"The moonstones are missing—and the brooch—and the anklets!"

Her mother began to cry whimperingly. Henry rose, avoiding her gaze.

"I hid them, too—five of them."

"You mean you have removed six of the pieces from the safe?"

"Yes, yes, but wait!"

This discovery shocked him. For nearly an hour he wandered to and fro, his body drawn from one room to another as his memories revived, brightened, untangled themselves. Late in the afternoon five of the jewels lay in a pile of soft flame on the table; but the diamond earrings had not been found.

A week passed, during which Henry McEldon was left alone to struggle with the elusive phantoms of his memory. The Stoddards stoutly believed that the earrings were still in the house. They felt that when once the shock of losing them had subsided, Henry would find readier access to the cluttered recesses of his memory.

He talked but little, although Lora came every evening, hoping against hope for a revelation. All she learned was that her father distinctly remembered taking the earrings from the safe shortly after she and Blythe left for Europe. For several hours, he told her, he had puzzled as to a good place to hide them. Finally he drowsed in his chair, and dreamed of Lora's childhood.

He remembered vividly what she was like when his father, Bullard McEldon, appeared with the earrings. Somehow, he declared, his vision gave him a remarkably good idea for hiding them. He remembered rising from his chair, yawning, and walking into the corridor; but there his recollection blurred and melted into maddening confusion.

Seeing that no progress was being made, Lora entreated her husband's aid. Without telling her parents, they engaged a detective to watch the maids and to check up on every one who had come to the house since their departure. They ransacked the house from attic to cellar. They opened trunks and boxes, they tapped moldings, wainscotings, walls, and even the bricks of the chimneys.

When this failed to produce results, they called in a carpenter, and had him examine all the heavy antiques for secret drawers, rip open their backs, remove the bottoms from precious chairs, and pry loose whole sections of the shelves.

As the old man tripped over piles of books, heard the hammer beating on his precious possessions, saw the accustomed order of a generation turned into confusion, he tried to stop it. The ruinous desecration of the cathedral of his memory upset him. He felt scorned, humiliated, crushed. The strain was too much for him. He suffered a nervous collapse, and took to his bed.

Awake, he reviewed the events of the day when he hid the diamonds. In his imagination he again drowsed before his table with the pale yellow case open before him. Again and again he rose and walked into the hall, where suffocating gray mists enveloped him and drove him back into the library. There, freed from the mists, he began once more to grapple with the broken memory; and so it went on endlessly. Drowsing off, he over and over muttered incoherently the word:

"Lora!"

In the morning, when his breakfast was brought to him, he complained of nightmares. The visions were no longer, as formerly, of burglars breaking in or hybrid monsters making off with his jewels in their dripping jaws, but always of himself standing in the corridor, engulfed in rising, choking tides of gray waters, which threatened to engulf him. At times, in the midst of his struggles to wade back to the library and safety, he would see the earrings floating about just beyond his reach. Once Lora's head as she was when a little girl, with long, wavy curls, appeared just above the water, looking about and smiling wistfully at him.

On one occasion, while striving frantically to part the mists before him, he woke to find himself on his feet, vainly trying to separate the curtains that shut off his bedroom from the library.

Gradually he recovered his physical strength and resumed his accustomed routine of life. His dreams continued, however, still centering themselves about the earrings. Dr. Leighton, the family physician, suggested that a psychiatrist should be consulted.

IV

PROFESSOR CHARLES ALBERT BURTON, a thickset, deep-voiced scientist with a short, rusty red mustache, propped his heavy chin on one hand and gazed intently at his subject through huge tortoise-shell

glasses. Mr. McEldon writhed in his chair, and answered the consultant's questions in monosyllables.

"Well," said Burton finally, leaning back and addressing the physician, "his ability to control the nature of his dreams is a bit unusual, though not astonishing. He obviously has a certain psychic gift of self-hypnosis."

"But don't you think," said Dr. Leighton, "that the memory he is seeking is by this time hopelessly buried in his subconsciousness?"

"No, I shouldn't say so—not so long as he has these very definite associations with his daughter's childhood. Incongruence and incoherence, contrary to general belief, are not necessary characteristics of dreams. We often find people whose dream ideas show an extraordinary power of reasoning and orderliness."

"You really think, then, Dr. Burton," said Mrs. Stoddard eagerly, "that it is worth while—"

"Yes, I certainly think so. Let him continue with the experiment, at least for a fortnight or so."

Thereafter began a more deliberate search for the diamonds in the mysterious arcana of dreams. Henry McEldon did not dream every night of the hiding of the earrings, but, as time passed, he found the subject recurring more and more. He began to complain, at first with exasperation, then with dismay, that whenever he reached the library in his sleep, he invariably woke with a violent start.

He frequently reported dreams of Lora's childhood. At such times, when he woke, his nerves were shaken and his brow wet with perspiration.

After a sip of sherry and a bromide powder, he would lie down again and sleep easily, without dreaming of the event any more that night.

He never walked again in his sleep until the second month. Then he rose from his bed one night, and groped around in the library for several minutes. On being awakened, his mind was a blank.

Meanwhile Lora Stoddard saw her husband return to her each evening worn out, haggard with anxiety, and deeply discouraged. One night, after a long and moody silence, from which his wife's kisses failed to rouse him, he said:

"In times like these the man who survives is the man who has capital to tide

him through. I'm cleaned out. Lora, it means—bankruptcy!"

The next morning Lora hurried over to Lexington Avenue and laid the whole case before her father. Benumbed by his failing experiments, and softened by his sense of guilt, Henry McEldon opened the safe and removed a moonstone necklace and an ivory reliquary. Slowly he placed them in his daughter's hands, saying, with unexpected gentleness:

"Very well! I must have more time. These will buy it; but please, please, don't sell them yet. Blythe can secure a loan on them, can't he?"

This was done. A sixty-day loan was negotiated with a diamond broker in Maiden Lane, and young Stoddard began his struggle with renewed life.

The old connoisseur redoubled his efforts to control his dreams. All day long he brooded on his broken memory. When his wife or daughter, anxiously watching over him as he sat with his gray head bowed in his hands over his library table, urged him to take a walk, or to go to the theater or for a motor ride, he refused with surprising stubbornness.

"Three of my jewels are gone now," he would say. "I must find the earrings before the loan matures. I shall then exchange them for the pledged jewels. After that, Lora, whatever happens to the earrings is your affair."

"But, father, dear," she would reply, "the earrings are in the house. We're bound to find them some day. You're making yourself sick. Please—"

But he only shook his gray head and tightly grasped his long wrists.

"The earrings are yours now, dear father," she pleaded. "Let's wait until they turn up. Come, let's take mother out for a ride!"

Grimly he sat without speaking.

Soon after this his appetite began to fail. He complained of fatigue, and developed a melancholia that alarmed his family and his physician. He was peremptorily ordered to cease his efforts, and Dr. Leighton instructed him to go South at once, for a change of environment.

It was too late. His daughter discovered him, one morning, marking off the days of a calendar that he kept hidden in a pigeonhole of the highboy.

"Only twenty-one days left!" he replied to their adjurations, waving them

aside, and begging them with a childish whimper to leave him alone with his troubles. "I'm rebuilding my mind," he would tell them.

Blythe asked the broker for an extension of time on the loan. This was agreed to only on condition that another jewel should be pledged. The young man went straight to his father-in-law and said:

"Mr. McEldon, I'm being pushed to the wall. The loan has nine days yet to run. I shall not be able to meet it."

Anger beat a pale infusion of color into the old connoisseur's gaunt cheeks.

"Very well!" he snapped. "I lost the earrings, and I'll find them!"

"But you're killing yourself, Mr. McEldon. You'll either lose your life or weaken your mind. It would be far better to forget the earrings."

"I can't forget them!" His long, sensitive fingers gripped and ungripped his bony wrists. "I'll find them—I'll find them to-night!"

"Mr. McEldon, I have talked to both Dr. Leighton and Dr. Burton. They say you'll weaken your mind, if you—"

"My mind!" The hollow, set eyes transfixed the young man. "My mind! Yes, I must be careful, but—I shall find the earrings to-night!"

V

THAT night Mrs. McEldon moved a bed into her husband's room, and slept near him. Toward midnight she was awakened by a sudden high-pitched cry of anguish. She sprang up, to find Henry McEldon sitting up in bed, clutching his head, the clothing hurled from him, his haunted eyes staring into the shadows. She gave him a bromide powder, and sat beside him, stroking his damp brow, until he fell asleep again.

Three nights later she was again awakened by the same piercing cry. Switching on the light, she saw her husband's bed empty.

Cries came from the library. There she found him, striding wildly about, groping, clutching the air, trying to seize something which seemed just beyond his grasp. As soon as he felt his wife's arms, however, he awoke. He piped a childish apology, and, after taking a sleeping powder, he lay down again, groaning:

"I almost had it that time—I almost had it! My head is cracking. Put me to

sleep again, Martha, for God's sake—sleep!"

On the afternoon of the day before the sixty-day loan expired, McEldon was scarcely able to sit up. Nevertheless, with the inexplicable zeal of his semihypnotic state, ignoring the advice of physician, wife, and daughter, he dressed himself as usual, and took up his vigil at the library table. Mrs. McEldon was suffering from a nervous headache, and, wishing to make up lost sleep, went to her room, and Lora came into the library.

Her father sat propped on cushions in his tall, carved chair. When questioned by the physician that morning, he had complained of a twitching in the muscles of his legs. Even while awake, he said, he felt as if he were standing in the darkness of the corridor, and his legs wanted to go forward, but something drove him back.

Asked about the pain in his head, he pressed his sunken temples, closed his eyes, and said:

"I had a great building here—a cathedral, I think it was. The walls are cracking—oh, God!"

Now, alone with his daughter, these torments gripped him once more. Again he concentrated on the obscure fog of his lost memory. Doors opened before him on both sides, and, to his utter amazement, banged noiselessly shut again. Beads of perspiration broke out on his pale brow. Tremors shook him. Fiercely he gripped his wrists to check them.

As a faint, tremulous groan broke from his lips, his daughter leaned forward, asking anxiously:

"What is it, father?"

He made no answer. Lora brought him his tea, but he let it remain untouched. She tried to read to him, but her voice only irritated him, and he waved her to silence.

He closed his eyes to shut out the swinging mocking doors. His legs twitched more violently than ever. He saw the two diamonds glowing like fat demon eyes far down in bottomless pits. His head buried in his trembling fingers, he groaned:

"Oh, Lora, if you knew how carefully I built up this thing—my memory! It was like a wonderful building to me, a great church. Every stone, every arch, every cornice, was in its place. I lived there. I—Lora, Lora, it's falling apart! See, the dust, the dust!"

His thin voice rose to a wail.

With a little cry, Lora dropped her work, and, sitting on the arm of his chair, stroked his damp hair, crooning to him softly. She tried to distract his gruesome thoughts by recalling the happy days of her young girlhood. She spoke of the times when they used to take long walks together, or played with her toys on long winter evenings.

Once, as she talked, he tried to rise suddenly, and then sank back, his long hand brushing vaguely at his brow. He began to cry weakly. Lora called a maid, and together they led him, unresisting, to his bed.

That night Dr. Leighton was again called in. Fearing that Henry McEldon's nerves were more than ordinarily affected, by reason of the loan's expiring on the following day, he administered an extra heavy sleeping powder. Following his advice, Mrs. Stoddard took her mother's place on the couch in her father's room. Merely donning a dressing gown, she lay down as soon as the old man had finally retired for the night.

Lora Stoddard was fatigued, and, being a sound sleeper, she did not awake when, three hours later, in the dead of night, her father quietly pushed the bedclothes from him, got out of bed, still sound asleep, walked to the velvet hangings over the doorway, parted them, and entered the library. His eyes open, his emaciated hands lifted and protruding from his long white gown, he walked quickly to his table through the spectral gloom, which was only intensified by the dim light from the street struggling through the heavy curtains.

Here he stood for a moment, his finger tips touching the papers on the table top. He turned, faced the door leading to the corridor, and strode quickly toward it. Opening it, he passed into the darkness beyond.

Without a pause he proceeded noiselessly down the basement stairs, passed the bathroom door on the left, and stood before the closed door leading into a small storeroom.

This door he opened deliberately. Once inside, he passed along between the wall to the right and the cluttered, broken furniture. Some neatly tied bundles of papers lay on a shelf, faintly illumined by the pallid spring moonlight entering the single, curtainless window.

To one side of this window stood a low table bearing a blue and white Dutch doll's house, one of his daughter's childhood toys.

The tiny furnishings lay about in disorder—drawers pulled from bureaus, sheets and blankets from the little beds. No one had put it in order since the careful examination of it two months before.

The sleepwalker ran his fluttering, bony fingers over the floor of the little house, which was covered with blue squares outlined in white. By pressing beneath one edge of the floor he easily removed a piece of real tile, intended for the hearth, which in design was indistinguishable from the painted wood. From the cavity thus disclosed he drew forth a thin, square jewel case, covered with pale yellow leather.

Replacing the tile, he immediately faced about and returned, without mishap, to the table in the library. He sat down, and, following his immemorial habit of secreting things, opened the middle drawer and placed the case within it. Then he carefully and firmly closed the drawer, and retraced his steps to the curtained hangings leading into his bedroom.

In trying to part the curtains, his fingers became entangled in the heavy folds. With a sudden jerk he threw them apart, causing a sharp tinkle of the brass rings that held them suspended on a wooden rod overhead, and staggered into the bedroom.

The noise awakened his daughter. Instantly she sprang up, calling to him almost out of her sleep. She reached the switch near the head of her bed, flooding the room with light.

Seeing her father staggering back to his bed, she sprang toward him, her face a white mask of fright.

"Father, what is it?" she cried.

She saw that he did not hear her. The arm he extended toward his bed was strangely rigid. His eyes, wide open, stared, unseeing, at the silken canopy. He was asleep.

Fascinated, uncertain what to do, she stood back, watching him. He got into bed, pulled up the coverings, sighed deeply, closed his eyes, and lay motionless. Satisfied that he was sleeping peacefully, she again darkened the room and returned to her bed.

VI

THE next morning, at dawn, Henry McEldon awoke with his usual feeling of fatigue and the maddening twitching in his legs. He sat up suddenly, emitting a faint groan.

By the pale light struggling through the heavy curtains he saw that the couch was empty. His daughter had already risen to care for her mother, and to enjoin the maids not to move about the front of the house until her father should awake.

He gazed at the bed, his untrimmed white hair tumbled about his gaunt temples. He felt a gruesome pleasure in finding himself alone. Sucking in his breath with nervous gasps, he shoved his feet into his slippers, threw on his bathrobe, and staggered into the library, his fingers pressed to his forehead.

He mechanically jerked the chain of the table lamp and sank to the edge of his chair, cowering before the black floods which once more swirled about him and the multitudinous doors which everywhere banged noiselessly to and fro, challenging, mocking him.

Rising again suddenly, he stepped to the cabinet of the highboy, opened the mulioned doors, and drew forth the calendar from its hiding place. Tremblingly and slowly he tore off a leaf, letting it flutter to the floor. Then he placed the calendar on the table in the flood of light. The words he had written weeks before stood forth, stark, menacing:

Loan expires to-day.

He lowered himself into his chair, drew his arm across his eyes in a gesture of despair, and groaned:

"I am going mad! The loan expires—"

Sudden tremors racked his frail body. Seizing the decanter, he poured off two goblets of sherry and drank avidly, spilling the wine on his untrimmed beard.

"My head! My head!" he cried, and fell back, limp, in his chair. "I must be mad—mad!"

Frantically he tied his dressing gown tightly about his waist, and rose, shoving the chair away. Stumbling, running, he entered his bedroom, and took the ivory-handled revolver from the drawer of his bed table. Returning to the library, he sat down and gazed at the little hole, black and deep, which spits out death. He felt a confused, inexplicable joy.

"I'll end it!" he chuckled, turning the weapon in all directions.

He examined the barrel, to make sure that it was loaded.

"I must say good-by," he declared, with the calmness of resolution. "I must ex-

plain this to them. They must know I was—mad. The shattered cathedral of my mind"—he was phrasing his last words to them when he suddenly paused; there was no note paper on his table—"has brought a horror of despair"—automatically he opened the middle drawer, where he kept his paper—"worse than death."

His mind suddenly ceased to function. His arm fell limply to his lap; his eyes opened wider as he leaned forward, staring incredulously. He was stunned. There, beneath his eyes, lay the faded yellow jewel case!

After several seconds, he touched the case with palsied fingers. He opened it, and saw the two diamonds flashing their cold blue-white fires from the bed of black velvet. He leaned back weakly and closed his eyes. The doors began to swing to and fro, then suddenly stood still. The gray mists rolled up, parted, and disclosed the little blue-and-white Dutch doll's house. He started up, crying out:

"My dream! I dreamed this last night! I opened that drawer last evening before going to bed. I—found—the—earrings—in—my—sleep!"

He fell back into his chair, clutched the jewel case, spread his long legs under the table, and broke out into a laugh so loud and prolonged that his wife and daughter came running to the library. Another instant, and the three of them were clasped in a mutual embrace, almost hysterical with joy.

Several weeks later, Blythe Stoddard, third curator of the McEldon collection, had completed an exhaustive inventory of the heirlooms, and was planning a business-like administration of the family possessions. Everything not absolutely needed for the happiness of the new home was to be sold, and the proceeds were to be carefully invested.

In time even the bizarre and cumbersome toys which Lora's father had given her as a little girl were included in a series of auctions—all but the quaintly decorated little Dutch doll's house with the tiny candles in the windows and the fireplace of blue tiles. She refused to part with this precious relic.

"Father was always especially fond of it himself," she told Blythe wistfully. "Once, years ago, he worked over it for an entire day, making this hiding place beneath the tiles."

Obligations

CONCERNING THE FEES THAT HOPE AND FEAR AND PAIN
AND HAPPINESS COLLECT FROM US ALL

By Elizabeth York Miller

Author of "The Greatest Gamble," "The Ledbury Fist," etc.

VIRGINIA O'DARE, the daughter of a lawyer in Little Rock, Arkansas, runs off to play with the children of poor neighbors. She is swinging a boy named Nicholas Wayne when the swing breaks and Nicholas is thrown to the ground, apparently lifeless. Virginia flies home in terror, but does not confess her escapade to her parents, though she accuses herself of having killed Nicholas and suffers torments of remorse.

Malcolm O'Dare, her father, gets into political life, and is appointed an attaché at the American Embassy in London. Here Virginia, now a beautiful girl of twenty-one, becomes engaged to a young English baronet, Sir Nevill Davies. She is to be married in October, and in September she goes to Paris, with her mother and her fiancé, on a shopping expedition. In Paris she meets an artist friend, Fedor Chioistro, and visits his studio on the Rue Geneviève; and there she encounters Nicholas Wayne, whose murderess she has so long considered herself.

Nicholas, though not killed, was badly crippled, and he is now a struggling art student. He insists that Virginia must come to see him again; and she persuades Nevill to take her to Chioistro's door and to wait an hour for her at a neighboring café.

XII

OF Virginia's second meeting with Nicholas Wayne a whole volume might be written and a great deal might still be left unexplained. The temptation is to write nothing at all, merely to pass over it with a sigh; for the moment she disappeared from the view of Nevill Davies, and began the pilgrimage of the stairs, she was as one lost even to herself. She came down the stairs again well within the hour promised, rejoined Nevill at the café, and together they returned to the Regina; but really she was lost from the moment when she went into the house on the Rue Geneviève.

Months later she was found again—or, at least, she was reported as having been seen in various places: Some one claimed to have seen her in a shabby neighborhood near Versailles, and was so shocked that she—it was a woman—promptly wrote to Molly Shaw. There is pleasure in being shocked at other people's misfortunes.

This woman said to Mrs. Shaw:

I don't think I could possibly be mistaken in thinking that it was Virginia O'Dare. You never told me, Molly, just why the engagement between

her and Nevill was broken off—at the last moment, too—or what happened to her. Did she go back to America with her parents?

I am sure I saw her at Versailles. It was in that horrid long street with the tram lines, leading to the palace, and she looked very shabby—dreadfully shabby! She had a basket on her arm, and had evidently been marketing in the French *bourgeois* fashion. Hilbert and I had been spending the day at Versailles, and were looking for a taxi when she passed us. Hilbert saw her first.

"Good Heavens, isn't that Virginia O'Dare?" he said, and it was.

She recognized us, I'm sure, but she went by quickly, and we had no chance to speak to her. I won't attempt to describe what she looked like. It was only a passing glimpse, anyway. There was something terrible about her, Molly—too terrible for words. It quite spoiled our day.

One used to hear such queer things before she became engaged to Nevill, but she was always a sweet girl, I thought. Every one considered her lovely, except that awful old Fedor Chioistro. Of course you must have seen his portrait of her. Hilbert gave it such a name, funny but slightly blasphemous, I thought. Anyway, Chioistro did make her look somehow accursed.

Was there by any chance any other man mixed up in the affair? One never heard of any one but Nevill, and they always seemed so devoted. I simply gasped when I read it was broken off.

By this time I hope poor Nevill is recovering. Some time ago I heard that he'd got himself transferred to another regiment, and was in India, but Bruce Wakeley told me that he had resigned, and had gone out to shoot tigers.

When you write, Molly, I hope you'll relieve my curiosity a little.

Some one else—a man, this time—saw Virginia on a pleasure boat on the Seine. As he was going to St. Cloud himself, he had more time in which to observe her than Molly Shaw's correspondent had. The man's name was Toombe, and he had served the O'Dares as butler during their residence in South Audley Street, so there could be no mistake in his recognition. The incident of the St. Cloud boat happened two years after Virginia disappeared from the world which had known her.

Toombe's employer, the titled lady who had sublet him, together with her mansion, to the O'Dares, had returned to her own, and next summer Toombe spent his annual holiday in Paris. When he returned, he had some interesting gossip to retail to Mrs. Marston, the housekeeper.

Mrs. Marston and he had a bite of supper together in her sitting room the night Toombe came back. Between them, they saw that it was a satisfactory meal—cold pie and salad, a bottle of claret, and some very tasty Roquefort; but even the cheese was not tastier than what he had to relate.

"We were going to San Cloo that day," said Toombe. "Pronounced so, although it's spelled 'St. Cloud.' Little boats, you know, not so very different from our Thames steamers, but bigger, perhaps. Well, I don't know—maybe they aren't much bigger—"

"And you say you saw Miss O'Dare?" interrupted Mrs. Marston, who was not interested in the size of the Seine steamboats.

"Yes, I saw her," Toombe replied, in the defensive tone of one who did not quite expect to be believed. "I saw her and she saw me. She spoke to me. She was sitting there on the deck with a queer-looking little man—a broken-down jockey he might have been. He was a very queer-looking man, Mrs. Marston. When I say he might have been a jockey—"

"What did Miss O'Dare say to you?" asked the housekeeper.

"Just, 'Oh, how do you do, Toombe?' And I said, 'Very well, miss. I hope you're the same.' And she said, 'I'm quite well, thank you. Isn't it a lovely day? Are you having a holiday?' And I said, 'Yes, thank you, miss.' Well, other people were crushing in, and—"

"What did Miss O'Dare look like?" Mrs. Marston asked breathlessly.

"Look like? Now let me think." Toombe drained off a glass of the excellent claret while he was thinking, and then nodded his head slowly. "Very 'ard up, I should say. Been through it—regularly through it, by all appearances. You remember how pretty she used to be?"

Mrs. Marston was shocked.

"Her looks all gone?"

"Well, that's a question. What some folks calls looks, others don't. I'm no great judge, myself, of female beauty; but I do know this—Miss O'Dare was as pretty as a flower when Sir Nevill was a courting of her, and she isn't that now. You'd say she'd never see thirty again. And such clothes!"

"What did she have on, Mr. Toombe?"

"No hat," said Toombe.

"No hat?" shrilled Mrs. Marston.

"Nothing of the kind; and a shawl over her shoulders—a gray knitted shawl. She wore a sort of gray or brown dress that needed pressing, and shoes all worn down at the heels."

"Poor little thing! How *do* you make out it happened, Mr. Toombe? What *do* you suppose she did? Her mother and father so fond of her and all, and poor Sir Nevill! It's plain *he* didn't break off the engagement, otherwise I might know what to think. They seemed to have plenty of money. It couldn't be that her father wouldn't help her, whatever she did."

Toombe pursed his lips.

"I don't know," he mused. "I 'aven't told you the worst, Mrs. Marston."

"Oh!"

"Well, you and me both being settled and middle-aged, perhaps I'll tell you—only I wouldn't wish for it to go any further."

"No, of course not! I wouldn't dream—"

"There was a baby in her arms, Mrs. Marston."

Heavy silence hung for a moment over the cozy meal. Then Mrs. Marston sighed deeply.

"How old?" she asked.

"Ah, that I couldn't tell you—just a bundle in her arms. She kept smiling at it, and the jockey person kept poking his finger into its face. Quite intimate-seeming, they were, Miss O'Dare and the jockey."

"A Frenchman?"

"No, English, with an 'orrible cockney accent, believe me."

"She couldn't be *married* to a person like

that! On the other hand, she couldn't—oh, it's made me come all over queer, Mr. Toombe. What say we have a liqueur with our coffee?"

"I'm agreeable—quite," said Toombe.

Over the coffee and its comforting accompaniment, he expanded still further.

These two people—or three, rather, counting the bundle in Virginia's arms—had left the boat at St. Cloud, but immediately afterward Toombe had lost them. They went off up the hill in another direction, the jockey-looking person heavily burdened with parcels and a market basket, Virginia carrying what was obviously her own baby.

No, Toombe wouldn't say she had seemed exactly unhappy. He fumbled in his mind for words to describe her correctly, but finally gave it up. Her clothes—yes, he could describe them, and did so all over again. Her hair, he said, looked sunburned, and not quite so tidy as it might, but that might have been the wind. Any one would have taken her for a Frenchwoman of the lower middle class, as far as all that went.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. "She looked hungry and thin and not young, and there were sort of shadows on her cheeks—not exactly lines, you understand. Her hands were a little rough, and—"

"Did she wear a wedding ring?"

Toombe shook his head.

"That I can't tell you. I don't think so. I don't know, really."

Mrs. Marston was provoked.

"But if you noticed her hands, surely you'd have seen if she wore a ring!"

"It was careless of me," Toombe admitted. "I ought to have made a point of it; but you can't think of everything, especially when you're seeing the sights in a place like Paris. Besides, I didn't like to stare too hard. It didn't seem quite nice."

While this conversation was being carried on in the housekeeper's room in the South Audley Street house, over in Westminster two other people were also discussing Virginia. At least, she was the topic about which most of their talk hovered, although ostensibly they had met for quite another reason.

XIII

MOLLY SHAW's husband had died that summer, and Nevill, having been appointed guardian to her three children, had come back from India to see what he could do to

help her. It was the night of his arrival. They had dined together in her flat, and were now in the drawing-room, talking things over.

Molly made an attractive widow and bore her loss well. It was two months now since the sad event, and the first edge of grief had slightly dulled. Tom had left her comfortably off, though not as rich as she would have liked, and Nevill promised to take upon himself the cost of the two boys' education. Christopher was going to his first school that autumn, and Molly suffered the usual maternal qualms about it.

"Such a relief to have you here!" she said to Nevill, resting a pretty foot on the fender, where it could be seen and get warmed at the same time. "And you're looking well, my dear—much better than I—than I could possibly have hoped."

Nevill stirred restlessly. He knew what she meant.

"Oh, I've been keeping fit in one way or another," he replied. "Had quite a lot of sport, as a matter of fact."

"You're as brown as a berry, Nevill," observed Molly, studying him with lazy affection. "And aren't you getting just a little fat?"

"Hope not. I've only put on half a stone since—I went away."

"Two years ago, isn't it? How time flies! Two years ago next month. We were in Paris that September."

Nevill winced, then turned abruptly and began to fumble with the contents of the cigarette box. Mrs. Shaw reached out her hand.

"Me, too, Nevill, and give me a light, please. There's a letter on my desk. I saved it for you to read. It's from Louise Downe. You remember her? It's a year old now, but I thought it might interest you, and I didn't want to send it to you when you were so far off. Yes, that's the one. I put it out before dinner. She and Hilbert were in Versailles—well, you can read for yourself."

Molly puffed gently at her cigarette and fixed her gaze upon the fire. It was very still, except for the crackling of the sheets in Nevill's hands. She heard him go back to her writing table and lay the letter down again. After that he walked to one of the windows, parted the curtains a crack, and looked out.

"Nevill, it doesn't hurt still, does it?" Molly asked.

There was no immediate response, and she turned and looked at him. The tense young face was drawn. The eyes, once so merry, looked suddenly haggard, and poor Nevill's hands were clenched so tightly that to Molly it suggested that he must be in acute physical pain. She started up with a little cry of remorse.

"Oh, I didn't mean—forgive me, Nevill! I thought by this time—why, look at me! Tom's only been dead two months, and I shall never, never see him again—and you weren't even *married* to her, Nevill!"

"No," he said hoarsely. "I wasn't even married to her. You say that letter's a year old?"

Molly nodded.

"I think I'll go across to Paris. She—she may be needing some one."

"I hope you won't do anything stupid," Molly cried, her voice a little sharp. "She wouldn't let her own parents help her."

"Wayne wouldn't, you mean," Nevill corrected.

"The man she eloped with? Nevill, you've never told me a thing, yet all the time I felt you knew. Poor Edith didn't—of that I'm sure. Oh, that dreadful morning, Nevill—will you ever forget it—when we hunted all over the hotel for her, and were afraid we should miss the train—"

"We did miss it," Nevill reminded her.

"Yes, I know. And then came that note for Edith—just a few lines to say that she'd gone to Venice with a man named Nicholas Wayne, and they were to be married. I shall never forget Edith wringing her hands and crying, '*Who* is Nicholas Wayne?' If she said it once, she said it a dozen times. And then Malcolm rushed off to Venice to try to find Virginia, and came back looking like a death's head, to say that she was married right enough, but her husband refused to let them do anything, and Virginia herself seemed quite satisfied. It simply broke the O'Dares up. Nevill, you must have known something! Who was the man? Where did she get to know him?"

Nevill looked weary.

"She had known him all her life," he said listlessly.

"Don't be absurd! I never cared for Virginia, but she was certainly straight enough where men were concerned—at least, I should have said so. Well, obviously, she couldn't have been, although—"

"Oh, Molly, for Heaven's sake, stop! I can't stand this. Don't you see it's—it's

distasteful to me? On the top of Mrs. Downe's letter, too."

"I wish I hadn't shown it to you," sighed Molly.

"I'd rather have seen it. If you can spare me for a few days, I think I'll run across to Paris to-morrow."

"What's the good, Nevill? You'll only make yourself unhappy."

"I am unhappy. Do you think I can be happy if she's in want? That letter—a whole year ago—it reads as if she was up against it."

"What can you do?"

There was a brief silence. Then Nevill said:

"I don't know what I can do until I've tried."

"You probably won't be able to find her."

"I think I can. Fedor Chiostro will know where they are."

"Chiostro? Why should he know?"

Nevill shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Anyway, I can ask him."

"Did she meet that man at Chiostro's studio?" Molly demanded.

Nevill hadn't meant to give away even so much of Virginia's secret.

"I tell you she had known Wayne since she was a child," he said.

"He's an artist of sorts, and very lame. Malcolm found that much out; but it never occurred to Edith that Chiostro had anything to do with it. Nevill, I *wish* you'd tell me!"

"To begin with, I can't tell you anything, and I wouldn't if I could. Why should I give you something to chatter about? Oh, yes, you would, all over London—I know! Your 'poor cousin'!" Nevill was passionate. "Jilted at the eleventh hour, for this, that, or the other. Do you think I give a hang because I was jilted? Do you think I'm feeling sorry for *myself*? Well, you're jolly well mistaken, that's what you are. I'm not the one who's to be pitied. If only I had guessed! Never mind—it's too late, now. I must try to find her. And let me tell you, Molly, if you dare to breathe a word, more than you've done already—if you gabble to a living soul why I've gone over to Paris—I'll simply never forgive you, that's all!"

"Please, my dear! Have you quite finished?"

"Quite."

"That's a blessing. Now I've got just

one thing to add. I hope you'll forgive me if I remind you of what I said just before you asked Virginia to marry you. I said—"

"That she would ruin my life," Nevill supplemented. "Well, if it's any satisfaction to you—which I can't believe—she has. She has ruined it completely, but not in the way you predicted. You see, she didn't marry me."

Molly gave it up. Nevill was really impossible; yet her heart yearned over him. It was dreadful to discover that he hadn't recovered from his infatuation. Most men recovered, particularly when they had been treated in so humiliating and contemptuous a fashion. Nevill should have hated Virginia O'Dare for making him look such a fool; but it was obvious that he still cared for her.

And there was some mystery about the affair, quite apart from Virginia's reckless and inexplicable conduct. It seemed almost as if Nevill knew why she had done it; as if he understood to the point of complete forgiveness. Of course, it was a lie if Virginia had told him that the Wayne man was a lifelong friend of hers. Even had it been true—which it couldn't be—that didn't excuse her for the way in which she had treated Nevill.

Slow tears trickled down Molly's cheeks. Nevill was a grown man, and she couldn't prevent him making a complete idiot of himself if he was determined upon it.

She thought of her own two little boys. One day they would be grown up and at the mercy of a world filled with devouring women—women who would pretend to love them and then hurt them cruelly. Oh, no, Christopher and little Tom were far too sensible to fall into such traps. Besides, she was their mother; unfortunately she wasn't Nevill's.

If only she could lace Nevill into a strait-jacket and sentence him to bread and water for a week! If only she hadn't shown him Louise Downe's letter! Yes, it was folly to show him the letter before she'd sounded him as to his feelings. If only Tom hadn't died! Heavens, how she missed Tom—wise, friendly, tolerant Tom! But even he had liked Virginia O'Dare—had liked her immensely.

"Molly dear, don't cry. I didn't mean to be savage with you."

Nevill caressed her hair with an awkward brotherly gesture.

"It doesn't matter. It's only because I

—I feel sorry for you," said Molly, between chokes.

"You needn't," he replied.

XIV

WHAT people might be tempted to call the inevitable had happened to Virginia O'Dare. It was impossible for her not to have made a deep impression upon Nicholas Wayne, even on the occasion of their first meeting, although he had shown it only by asking or demanding to see her again.

There was, to begin with, the mere fact of her beauty; but time would prove that physical loveliness was by no means Virginia's most potent attraction. Greatest of all, perhaps, was the charm of the things she left unsaid, her little lapses into eloquent silence, letting her eyes speak or question for her; her troubled, reticent attitude toward life, which absorbed her so completely that she was careless of her appearance and unconscious of the effect she had on others.

Often in the old days her mother had said:

"Sometimes I feel like shaking Jinny, but it wouldn't do any good."

It was Nevill who had actually shaken her, by the power of his love. She had loved him so dearly in return, had been so happy, that it did not seem in the least strange to lose it all. In her curious consciousness after that meeting in Chioistro's attic studio, Nevill and Nicholas Wayne changed places. It was Nevill, now, who was the dream, Nicholas the reality.

Sometimes she puzzled to remember what it was they had said on the occasion of the second meeting. Neither Chioistro nor his wife was there, only Nicholas. He hadn't touched her or tried to kiss her, but he didn't take his eyes off her face once. There was one time when he laughed—not in that ugly, jeering way, but spontaneously, naturally; and she had been thrilled with a queer emotion that flooded her eyes with tears.

How accurately she had filled in for herself the details of his story! His mother was dead now. He had no one. The man who had taken an interest in him and his talent, when he was still lying on his back in the hospital, and had sent him abroad to study, was dead also. There he was, living precariously in his shabby attic, sometimes getting a bit of copying or renovating to do, selling a few oil sketches now and then for

only a franc or two more than it cost to produce them.

Chiostro had made his acquaintance when he was copying in the Louvre, and in offering to share the expenses of the studio for a while, had given him temporary affluence.

"I can do great things, if I want to," he said to Virginia. "At least, Chiostro thinks so; but what's the use? A fellow like me has to have something more in his life than just art—a woman, perhaps. Oh, yes, there are plenty of women in Paris, but—"

He broke off with an impatient gesture.

"It's good to talk with you, Jinny!" Quite simply he called her by the old name. "You're a—a wonder girl; but you're afraid of me—you hate me. I'm repulsive to you, and I don't wonder. I hate myself most of the time!"

Then he had laughed, gently, sweetly, never taking his eyes from her face, and she had been thrilled to the point of tears. This was the man she had broken. How could she mend him? She asked him in that hesitating way of hers, as if the thought behind the question was difficult to express as she wanted to express it.

"Could I—do anything? I wish I could. Nicholas, I'd give my *life* if it could make you well and happy! You see, I have always thought of you. I have never forgotten that it was I who—who hurt you."

"You'd give your life—you?" he exclaimed, a passionate flame leaping into his dark eyes.

"Yes—only tell me what to do."

She was thinking that, after Nevill and she were married, they could have him at Davies Hall and interest people in his work. If Chiostro thought it was good, it must be good.

"Then give me your life," Nicholas said. "Marry me. I've got enough to keep us for a couple of months. We'll go to Venice. Of course, your people wouldn't consent. You'd have to elope with me, Jinny!"

He watched her narrowly as he spoke, his voice half jesting, yet behind it he was tensely serious. Watching her, it was difficult to guess what was passing in Virginia's mind. The suggestion must have surprised and startled her, yet her expression did not change perceptibly.

She returned his gaze for a moment, then said:

"Very well, Nicholas."

He was more surprised by her reply than she had apparently been at his question.

Abruptly she got up from the chair in which she had been sitting, and fastened her chinchilla collar.

"I must be going now. Some one is waiting for me at the corner. We're staying at the Regina, and planning to go back to London on Monday. If you'll write telling me just what to do, I—I'll do it."

And that was about the most important part of the interview, which had taken place on a Thursday.

On Saturday Virginia heard from him. He told her to meet him early on Monday morning, and at what station. She was there with a suit case and a small dressing bag. Nicholas had told himself that she wouldn't be there; but at the back of his mind something assured him that she would keep her word, though for the life of him he couldn't guess why.

Why—*why*? Chiostro had told him bits about her, but hadn't seen fit to mention Nevill Davies. She was the child of well-to-do parents, a society darling, according to Chiostro, and everything about Virginia's appearance bore out that description.

"Well, we won't live on her father, if that's what she thinks," Nicholas said to himself with a gruesome touch of humor. "And, my God, we shall be poor! *Why* did she agree to marry me?"

Then he shrugged his shoulders. There were girls in the *quartier* who—but never mind. In spite of his lameness, he could have picked and chosen from a very catholic assortment.

"Perhaps," he thought, "she has fallen in love with me at first sight, just as I did with her."

As time wore on, that idea exercised a fearful fascination over him.

Virginia was of age, and they managed to get married in Venice just a lick ahead of Malcolm O'Dare's arrival. There had been nothing that Malcolm could do. The Waynes were housed in a small but comfortable hotel, and the bridegroom, except for his lameness, made a fairly presentable appearance. He said that he could take care of Virginia and meant to do so without family assistance.

Virginia said little or nothing beyond the fact that she was sorry to have given so much trouble. Her grieved eyes implored her father to forgive her, but just then Malcolm was too angry to be gentle. For the first time, Nicholas learned that Virginia had been engaged to marry another man,

and that her elopement had stirred up more of a hornets' nest than had been apparent.

What could Malcolm do but go back to Edith and report that their mad daughter was at least married, and that they must cancel the arrangements for her previous nuptial agreement? There was absolutely nothing else to do. The fellow wouldn't disclose his financial position, beyond a stiff assertion that he could provide for his own wife, thank you. Nothing from Virginia except that she was sorry, but she had known Wayne for a long time, though she had only recently determined to plunge into matrimony with him.

As Molly Shaw said to Nevill, it broke the O'Dares up completely. Malcolm resigned his post at the embassy, and they went home. It was their consolation, of course, that they still had each other; but they missed Virginia more than either of them would have thought possible when they had arranged for her marriage to Nevill. She was lost—poor, lost Virginia—flopping blindly out of the warm home nest into such peril as the world holds for sparse-feathered fledglings.

There was the honeymoon in Venice, and all Wayne's money was spent by the time they got back to Paris. Chiostro had gone, and when Nicholas was offered some restoring work at Versailles, they left the studio and went to live in a café near the palace.

It was during this period that Molly Shaw's friend caught a passing glimpse of Virginia, and her report of it spoke as eloquently as any more detailed description of the poverty of the young couple; but the work was steady enough to count upon for another two years. By the following spring the Waynes had saved a little, and Nicholas found a cottage at St. Cloud with a small garage, which he converted into a studio, and into it they moved with their few possessions. There, in May, the baby was born—a little girl whom it was Virginia's whim to name Cherry.

In the late summer of that year one recalls that Mr. Toombe saw her with the baby on a Seine boat, in the company of a man accurately described as having the appearance of a broken-down jockey.

So now it was October.

XV

WITH some dim idea of making both ends meet, the Waynes had taken a couple of lodgers. They were father and daughter,

and their names were Lonny and Marietta Collins.

The story of Lonny is a stale one to members of the racing fraternity—an oft repeated tale in which only the name of the hero changes. Like most jockeys, he had begun his career as a stable boy, and from thence he had gone up and up and up. He could tell you some wonderful and not too untruthful tales of his career—an amazing career that culminated somehow in the early nineteen hundreds, when he rode Lord St. Bevan's famous Scarsdale Rattler to victory in the Grand Prix, and thereafter could have had any mount he chose for any and all of the great racing events in England or France.

But—alas!

Lonny himself was either painfully loquacious or very silent on the subject of his downfall, according to the amount of liquor he had imbibed when the matter came up for discussion. Without going into unnecessary details, it is enough to state that he fell ignominiously from his high place, was disqualified by the Jockey Club for "pulling," and thereafter picked up his living where and how he could. At the present moment he was hostler, gardener, and handy man to a French doctor, who drove a rattling little trap, but who was thinking of getting a motor car—when no doubt Lonny Collins would be sacked. He did not shine either as a gardener or as a handy man, and he possessed not the faintest glimmer of intelligence when it came to handling machinery.

It was this little man that Toombe, the butler, had seen with Virginia on the steamboat. Undersized, red-faced, battered, grizzled, and slightly bowed of leg; affecting gaiters, a peaked cap, and a neckerchief—that was Lonny.

Generally smiling and always good-tempered, even under adversity, a friendly gleam in his watery blue eyes, the poor little fellow was cursed with a fiend of a daughter. This young virago would never let him forget that her mother, a French music-hall *comédienne*, had married him for his money and position, and had been fearfully let down. What had become of Mme. Collins Lonny did not know, but he possessed Marietta, the peppery fruit of their union; and there must have been times when he secretly wished that she would go the way of her mother and leave him in peace.

Lonny and Marietta had but one thing in common—they both adored Virginia's baby; but even this could be a source of discord, since jealousy marred their passion for the little innocent, and gave Virginia more trouble than gratification.

The Collinses occupied three attic rooms in Les Prairies, the chalet Nicholas had taken at St. Cloud, and Marietta did dress-making, either at home or going out by the day. She was a red-haired girl with sloe-black eyes, a sullen but somehow attractive mouth, and incurable heartache. Nicholas Wayne suspected her of a secret attachment for himself, and would not have endured her presence in his house except for Lonny, whom he liked, and who was his devoted slave.

Marietta did not cross Nicholas's path very often. For the most part she kept to her own rooms, when not out on business, while Nicholas, who was at Versailles four days of the week, worked in the garage studio when he was at home.

A little garden went with the chalet, and next door was the doctor's house, where Lonny Collins was nominally employed. In effect, whenever the doctor's back was turned, Lonny was through the gap in the hedge, keeping Nicholas company, should the latter be working at home, or else entreating Virginia to let him mind the baby for her.

Behind the chalet were three big meadows where cattle grazed, and beyond were a little stream and a gray church. Sitting in the garden with the baby on her knees, her eyes half closed, Virginia, with a slight effort of imagination, could fancy she was back in the Little Rock of her early childhood. She was always thinking of those days, and of the accident of long ago which had brought her to her present condition, as the wife of that Nicholas Wayne who had been left for dead under the cherry tree—the wife of Nicholas, with his baby on her knees, living humbly in a suburb of Paris, far from home, friends, and kindred.

Ah, that wasn't quite fair! She had her husband and her baby, and Lonny Collins was a faithful friend to all three of them. Marietta? Virginia gave little thought to Marietta. The cockney French girl did not like her especially, but tried to be amiable on the baby's account.

The rent money, of course, was useful, and Marietta did her best to pay promptly, although Lonny gave no helping hand. It

was no secret where his own wages went; but when he was on one of his rare fits of abstinence, he would give Marietta a few francs toward their food, and would buy extravagant presents, which always roused her to fury. Otherwise—well, if you haven't got it, if it has been sunk in the wine shop, where the real necessities of life come from, you can't give, that's all.

Virginia knew that Lonny Collins was not a reputable character, and that Marietta was, but she loved Lonny and did not care greatly for his daughter. This may be said to prove—as you choose to look at it—either that there is or that there is not a law of compensation.

On one sunny afternoon in October, a Saturday, Nicholas Wayne was busy in his improvised studio on a piece of hack work that he detested. The doctor next door had conceived the notion of acquiring a portrait of himself, and for this purpose was prepared to part with two hundred francs, a large bag of potatoes—now being harvested by the reluctant Lonny Collins—and a small bag of pears. It was a commission which Nicholas, being a man of family, could not afford to refuse.

The doctor had a bushy beard parted in the middle, round eyes, and a conspicuous watch chain. He was hard to please, and in this instance one painted not for art's sake, but for the baby's winter wardrobe, a perambulator—if the secondhand one for which they had been looking could be found at a price they could pay—and for wholesome fruit and vegetables.

Only these hard facts kept Nicholas docile, for the doctor not only gave advice about the proper way of depicting himself and the watch chain on canvas, but was full of conversation on other matters, principally concerning the lazy incompetence of Lonny Collins, and how soon he was going to buy his car and get rid of the fellow.

Nicholas, never too genial at the best of times, grew sour and silent, and longed to aim a fat blob of paint at the complacent beard that seemed to baffle his most determined efforts at satisfactory transmutation. Something had been done with the watch chain, but the beard stubbornly remained merely a bush, with a pearly white path down the middle.

The doctor, blessed with more patience than patients this sunny afternoon, cooed away with monotonous persistence, interrupting himself every fifteen minutes or so

to hop down from the model's throne and give free advice, after another squint at his beard as interpreted by Nicholas. The artist brooded and brooded, until it seemed likely that at any moment he might hatch out something terrific, which would imperil the perambulator and the baby's short-coating, to say nothing of all the pears and potatoes they had promised themselves.

Marietta was out marketing for Sunday. Lonny was over in the doctor's garden, digging the aforesaid potatoes, his labor considerably stimulated by the fact that his employer had an almost unobstructed view of him through the open door of the garage studio. Just a low hedge separated them; but although Lonny knew that the doctor was saying uncomplimentary things about him, he couldn't hear what was being said unless he rested from toil—which he did not dare to do.

The baby slept on a pillow in a soap box, the latter arranged on two chairs near the back door of the cottage. Virginia, always behindhand with her housework, was down on her hands and knees scrubbing the stone floor of the kitchen. This, which also served as a parlor, was the only decent-sized room in the cottage. A modern cook-stove had been set into the old-fashioned chimney nook, which was further improved with a lining of crude blue tiles.

The furniture was scanty, and Virginia, apparently, did not know how to make the most of it. Along one wall there was a worn couch, which would have looked better with a fresh muslin cover of however cheap material. There was a big deal table, which a Frenchwoman would have kept scoured as white as her hand. There were a few chairs, uncomfortable-looking little things with scarcely more than an edge to sit on; a dresser that needed a coat of paint, dishes that didn't match, a three-legged stool by the fire, and, tacked up thickly against the whitewashed wall, various sketches of Nicholas's, mostly of Virginia.

Dozens of ethereally conceived Virginias watched the material Virginia on her knees, struggling with the scrubbing brush, and wishing that she could afford a new pail—the old one being past mending—instead of having to use the baby's bath for this insanitary purpose. Of course she would scrub the bath out afterward, but Virginia was a very poor scrubber, and she knew it. That was probably one reason why Marietta Collins scorned her.

To watch Virginia at work on that kitchen floor was painful. She had on a print dress which had started the day fresh, but which was now all wet and dragged about the edges. Her sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, and it was a little shocking to see where the firm, white flesh of the forearms lost its satiny hue and texture in grimed crimson just above the wrists. Virginia's once beautiful hands had grown coarse with thready black lines, and her finger nails were blunt and broken.

As she worked, she thought of German Sophie, the servant of her childhood, who used to threaten her with gypsies. A reluctant, half envious admiration of Sophie welled up in her consciousness. Sophie had always done everything so perfectly.

"When I'm through with this floor, it'll look worse than when I began," muttered Virginia.

But she kept at it. Like lots of other things in her life, it was something to be done.

When she finished, she would have to change her dress and go out and market, as Marietta Collins was doing at this moment, and it would be late, and the pick of everything would be gone. She would have to ask Nicholas for money, and she knew he would be in a bad temper. He would give it to her, but she wished he wouldn't always make her ask him for it, and then perhaps remind her that she had had twenty francs only on Wednesday. He would ask if it was really necessary to pay three francs a cake for the baby's soap, and would add that how he was going to see them through next week was beyond his power of imagination.

Still, he would give her money. He was paid yesterday—she knew that. Everything was so horribly expensive, and he got less for his work at the palace than a night watchman.

What should she buy for to-morrow's dinner? The cheaper meats always took a lot of clever cooking. When she tried a casserole dish, either the fire went out, through trying to keep it low, or, if it was too hot, the meat galloped to a toughness that threatened to break their teeth, and frequently did break Virginia's heart.

If only she could afford some really decent chops! She had mastered the art of chops to Nicholas's not too exacting taste. He liked them burned on the outside and raw in the middle. Virginia could do them that way. In fact, it was the only way she

could do them, short of steaming them to an unappetizing limpness.

Perhaps to-day they could run to chops. A great deal depended upon his progress with the portrait of *monsieur le docteur*. Oh, Heavens, what a nuisance life was, so filled with petty, interfering things, when one would like a little leisure for mental reconstruction!

She was rather tired and hot. Every minute or so she had to reach up with her wrist and push away a loosened strand of hair that kept falling across her eyes. Finally the obvious occurred to her, and she laughed sadly at her own lack of intelligence. She hadn't thought of the obvious until all her hair began tumbling down, and some of the pins scattered on the floor and caught in the cloth that she was using to sop up the dirty water. She pricked her finger on one of them, and a drop of blood oozed out.

"What an idiot I am!"

Yet in the old days, although people had argued a lot about Virginia, no one—not even Molly Shaw—would have said that she was lazy or untidy. Self-absorbed, uninterested in many things that mattered—but not such a reckless young woman as this picture has seemed to paint.

"What an idiot!" she panted, sitting on the floor, with her damp knees doubled under her.

She pinned up her hair again, rather vicious about making it secure this time. The lock which had primarily offended got wound around a hairpin all its own, and the end of the pin was bent, so that there should be no future nonsense.

"Once I wanted to be a trained nurse," Virginia commented to herself, as she resumed the cleansing operations. "Well, mother had more sense than I had."

A little lump came suddenly into her throat.

"I'd like to see mother," she thought, her lips moving in a soft muttering. "I'd like her to see Cherry. It seems so funny to think of her being a grandmother! I wonder where they are? Perhaps I ought to write."

The red wrist went up to her eyes. There was a blur obscuring them.

"I'm glad she doesn't know. I'm glad nobody knows. Not that I mind—only they'd feel sorry for me, and I couldn't stand that. They'd want to help, and that would be unbearable!"

Slosh, slosh, went the scrubbing brush. Little muddy puddles accumulated, and were wrung back into the tub through the medium of the soppy cloth. The water ought to be changed, but it would have to be fetched from a pump in the garden, and Virginia was developing a backache. Such dirty water! But long ago she had got over any squeamishness about plunging her hands into unpleasant things.

Never once had she committed the weakness of feeling sorry for herself. She was irritable on occasions, yes—but that had always been through sheer physical fatigue, like the time when the baby was only two months old, and had suddenly developed a taste for staying awake all night and voicing an obscure grievance that no amount of patient attention could appease. Virginia had borne this infliction for two weeks, until she basely fell to the first aid that was to be got out of a "dummy," hygienists notwithstanding, and at the possible risk of spoiling the baby's mouth, as every woman who hadn't a howling infant of her own predicted.

She had been irritable then, and Nicholas—who had made up a bed for himself in the studio—commented upon her slowness in getting through household tasks, and being late with supper one evening when he came home particularly hungry. She had been very sharp with Nicholas on that occasion, and a little sharp with Marietta Collins, who was among those who insisted upon the evil aftereffect of the "dummy."

Through that time of trial the doctor next door had been of great comfort. He upheld Virginia. Lonny and Marietta, between them, had spoiled the baby, and he told Nicholas that unless his wife got some relief she would go mad.

Oh, well, that tiresome episode was over now. If Cherry decided to sit up after other people's bedtime, Virginia deceived her with the false assurance that she was imbibing nourishment, and all was peaceful. Lonny, for one, admitted that the change was refreshing. He, too, had lost a good deal of sleep, his room being directly over Virginia's.

The church bell across the meadows chimed four, and Virginia glanced at the alarm clock on the mantel. A quarter to four, by the alarm clock. Always wrong! Nothing—*nothing* could make it keep time. Oh, well, there was the church clock to go by. Why worry over a thing like that?

She wrung out her cloth for the last time, and gave the section of floor within her radius a final smear. At that moment, some one tapped at the door.

"*Entrez!*" called Virginia, still on her knees, hoping it might be the baker, who came when he felt like it.

There was a brief interval of hesitation, then the latch was lifted and the door opened. Framed against the bright hues of the autumn garden stood Nevill Davies—Nevill, looking as smart as paint in a gray lounge suit and overcoat and the newest thing in bowlers; Nevill, the traveler from a distant world which had ceased to exist for Virginia Wayne.

She hadn't the faintest idea how painful, how embarrassing, was the impression she made upon him. It was as if he had been stabbed and humiliated in a single blow. He had been prepared for a change both in herself and in her circumstances, but he hadn't been prepared for a Virginia on her knees scrubbing the stone floor of such a poverty-stricken room. The tragedy of her struck him squarely between the eyes.

He did not know what to say. For a wild moment, he wished he hadn't come. This was—he could not find the right word for it. "Damnable" sufficed as well as any.

Virginia scrambled to her feet. She felt peculiarly helpless. She was not thinking so much of the change in herself and her surroundings as of the fact that when Nevill and she had last parted, there was deception on her part.

That Sunday night, in the Hotel Regina, she had let him kiss her at the door of her room, had let him believe that they were all going back to London together the next day, and that he and she were to be married in less than a fortnight. Of course, she had written to him from Venice and explained. Nevill was the only person in the world who really understood why she had eloped with Nicholas Wayne. She felt that he must have forgiven her long ago, but now there was something in his expression that dismayed her, that made her not so sure that he either understood or forgave.

"Nevill—this is a surprise," she said slowly, after they had stood and stared at each other for so long that it seemed weird to be standing there like that in utter, stupefied silence.

Her voice apparently woke him up. He began a hasty explanation.

"I'm in Paris for a few days. Ran into

Chiostro at the International Club, and he told me you were living here. Thought I'd look you up. Such a wonderful afternoon, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, we've been having lovely weather—more like September. Do come in, Nevill! It's good to see you again. Sit down, will you? I'll call Nicholas. He's in the studio. Wait a minute—just let me get this thing out of the way."

She started dragging at the tub of dirty water, and Nevill—fastidious, elegant Nevill—dashed forward to help her.

"That's too heavy for you," he protested. "What do you want done with it?"

Virginia's lips trembled.

"Never mind! Let it stay where it is."

And now she was trembling all over. She put up her hands—her poor, reddened, work-stained hands—and smoothed her untidy hair. How awful she must look! Her blue and white calico dress, all draggled and wet at the hem—Nevill had never seen her like this. He must be wondering.

She smiled the old adorable Virginia smile; but instead of flooding her face with sunshine, it merely lit up the shadows. Her eyes, sunken with fatigue, had the blank, bewildered look of a starving creature.

"You see," she said with a helpless gesture—"you see, Nevill, I wasn't expecting any one. It's Saturday, and I'm a little behind with my work. I know I'm an awful scarecrow, but if you'll just give me a moment to change—and then I'll put on the kettle, and call Nicholas, and we'll have some tea."

Nevill caught hold of one of the reddened wrists and drew her toward him. In spite of his sunburn, he looked deathly pale.

"I don't want to see the fellow," he said angrily. "A man that—that would let this happen to you! My God, you must know how I love you, that it couldn't end with me just because you ran away with somebody else. You *must* know! The sort of love I gave you—look at me, Virginia!"

He was holding both her hands, and Virginia's shoulders heaved miserably. She began to choke and sob.

"Don't, Nevill—don't make it any worse! You know how much I cared, too. You know why—this happened!"

A light step sounded in the passage leading to the scullery, and Virginia turned to see who it was, her hands still clasped by Nevill, twisting her head pathetically like a trapped bird. Her vision was blurred

with tears, but she saw that it was Marietta Collins—trim Marietta of the sulky mouth and scowling, contemptuous eyes, with a basket on her arm, and her flaming red hair lighting up the scullery passage with an effect of fire.

"Excuse me," said Marietta, "but the baby's awake, Mrs. Wayne. I thought you might like to know."

Little squeals came from the soap box in the garden. Neglected Cherry was demanding her mother, and was getting ready to be really peevish about it if something didn't happen soon.

XVI

NEVILL wanted to go, to rush off blindly from all these terrible things that broke his heart, but he felt chained. He simply couldn't tear himself away, although one part of him struggled so hard for freedom. If only he could go out of that abominable place, and by closing the door behind him convince himself that nothing of the sort existed!

The fact of Nicholas Wayne was bad enough, and to see Virginia worn and exhausted by poverty was something not to be borne; but a baby! Nevill hadn't thought of there being a baby to link Virginia even more firmly to the impossible man she had hypnotized herself into marrying. If people could be killed by an idea, he would have expired on the spot.

He sat down on the shabby sofa and stared vacantly at the sketches of Virginia—so many of them as he remembered her. One showed her with the very same chin-chilla toque and collar she had worn when—fool that he was!—he went with her to the door of the house in the Rue Geneviève, her head held a little to one side, her chin tucked against the soft fur. The Virginia of two years ago, that one was; but Wayne had sketched merely a pretty girl, a smirking, red-lipped doll. Virginia's lips weren't a brilliant red, nor were her eyes that bright, amazing blue. How could Nevill know that that particular sketch had been done with a view to its acceptance as a magazine cover—and had been rejected, which is another chapter of the same story?

He heard her moving about outside, and then in the next room. He heard her talking in low tones to the baby. Presently the red-haired girl came in, and, casting a sulky look at Nevill, busied herself with the fire. Her presence and her appearance puzzled

him. If she was a servant, why had Virginia been scrubbing the floor?

Marietta's dress didn't suggest that she was a servant. It was a rather pretentious dress of some brown silky material, very short in the skirt, and she wore silk stockings to match—at least they had the look of silk—and absurdly high-heeled shoes. There was no way for Nevill to tell that she was merely a lodger who had kindly offered to help out in this unexpected crisis.

He did not speak to her, nor she to him. She moved about deftly, seeming somehow, in her quick, sure manner, to cast reproach upon Virginia's haphazard housekeeping. There was no butter, and Marietta fetched some from her own larder. After looking about with an air of annoyance, she went out again, and this time fetched bread and a pot of jam. Half a cake was discovered in a tin box on the dresser, and this she set on the table with the other things, though it was plain that she did not think too highly of it.

When the kettle began to steam, she made tea; but by this time Nevill, having removed his scrutiny from the sketches, had grown critical of Marietta's excellence. He felt that he would like to tell her that her way of making tea was all wrong. She hadn't even warmed the pot, and he wasn't at all sure that the water had actually been boiling.

These details would not have impressed him, except for the fact that in some subtle way the red-haired girl had conveyed contempt for Virginia. Nevill longed to point out to her that she herself fell far short of perfection in the comparatively simple matter of brewing a pot of tea. Was she French or English? He couldn't decide. She had spoken to Virginia in English, but with a curious accent—French strongly tinged with cockney.

She went into the scullery again, and was heard talking to Virginia, saying that she would take the baby if the latter had finished her own meal. A delicate shiver ran over Nevill. Virginia with a child at her breast—another man's child! It was incredible that he should be sitting here enduring such revelations; yet they must be endured, because he had to help Virginia. That was what he had come for. Some way *must* be found!

Then dragging footsteps sounded outside, and a tall, black-haired man, leaning heavily on two sticks, entered the room through

the scullery passage. Nevill knew at once who he was, but he did not know that Nicholas was fully aware of his identity as Virginia's jilted lover.

In any case, the meeting was bound to be awkward, although Nicholas did not help to make it so. His task that afternoon had terminated happily. The doctor's beard had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, much better than had at one time promised to develop. There would be no more sittings, merely a little brightening of the background.

Virginia had rushed out to tell Nicholas who was here, and he had neither detained nor questioned her. He had merely nodded with that tight-lipped smile of his that always betokened a slight sense of triumph. Perhaps he was thinking of the happy ending of his trials with the doctor's portrait. Perhaps he was thinking of quite a different sort of triumph.

"All right, kid," he said. "I'll be in as soon as I've scraped my hands."

And now, with one of those freshly cleansed hands, he was greeting Nevill Davies, while he expressed his pleasure at meeting an old friend of Virginia's. He limped aside to make way for the scornful Marietta, who had decided that it was about time somebody removed the tub of water, and that she might as well do it herself. On this occasion the chivalrous Nevill offered no assistance. In spite of her high-heeled shoes, the sulky, red-haired young person seemed competent to attend to the matter.

"Call your father, Marietta," Nicholas said; "and both of you have tea with us."

Considering that most of the repast had been provided by Marietta, this was kind and condescending of Nicholas; but possibly he thought things would go off better with outside assistance. He was not without his secret misgivings. The sudden appearance of Sir Nevill Davies could mean only one thing—that Virginia's former lover wasn't yet resigned in his mind to having lost her. Nicholas, on his side, hadn't quite mastered the mystery of how it happened that Nevill had lost her.

At first it had seemed to Virginia's husband that she was the victim of one of those quick, inexplicable passions to which some women are subject—that she had been overwhelmed by the fantastic in him, and had given herself in the wayward frenzy of the moment. He had thought to teach her

a lesson—a lesson, indeed, for all women—by giving her an experience of life both harsh and grinding, just to show that he was in dead earnest.

But Jinny hadn't broken under it. She hadn't so much as cried "Help!" Everything was all right. The poverty and the unaccustomed drudgery, the doing without until one discovered how really few necessities there are in life—she had taken everything as it came.

Quite soon Nicholas discovered that she hadn't married him because she was madly in love with him, or because she believed him to be an overwhelming genius. There was nothing to which he could lay hand in accounting for her. She presented an enigma which until now he had accepted without attempting to solve. Perhaps he could learn something by observing what effect this slick, smart-looking young Davies fellow had on her.

Lonny Collins came in, fresh from the pump, and awed into a becoming silence. For all his past glories, Lonny was still old-fashioned, and recognized his betters when he met them. Thirty-five years ago he had been a lad in the training stables then maintained by Nevill's father, but he didn't see fit to mention this interesting historical fact. The Davies stables had long since passed into oblivion, and so had Lonny Collins. No need to rake things up when there was no real occasion for it!

They lingered a little, waiting for Virginia, the tea getting colder every minute, until Nicholas impatiently asked Marietta to pour it. Virginia appeared finally, having accomplished a hasty toilette. In Nevill's honor she had put on her best—a blue silk dress now rather shabby, which had been among the few things she had taken away with her. Nevill remembered it. She had worn that frock to dinner on the Sunday night before Nicholas and she eloped. It had a sheen of gray in it, and exactly matched her eyes.

Her burnished hair—it looked a shade darker to Nevill—had lost some of its wave. Apparently she had slicked it down with water in her hurry to get dressed. It was brushed smooth, drawn high, and wound simply in a coil at the top, giving her an old-fashioned look.

The baby hung in the crook of one arm, laughing and kicking. Virginia held her up for Nevill to see, but she avoided looking at him. She looked at the baby, instead. It

was a charming, healthy infant, with hair the color that Virginia's was now, curling in little soft ringlets. It had Virginia's eyes, too; but otherwise, Cherry was Nicholas Wayne's child. Even at the tender age of five or six months, it could be seen that she inherited her father's pure Greek profile and satirical mouth. There was something very knowing in the baby smile, something ravishing in the little hands that pulled and tugged at Virginia, something possessive in the small feet that stamped so determinedly upon her mother's knees, all instinctively suggesting Nicholas Wayne.

Lonny Collins held out his arms.

"Give 'er 'ere," he croaked.

Marietta flashed her father a look which said, "Can't you ever hold your tongue?" although this was about the first time poor Lonny had spoken.

Virginia handed over her child to Lonny. She didn't ask Nevill what he thought of Cherry, and he made no comment. He was trying to talk intelligently to Nicholas on the difficult subject of art, and Nicholas—though dead sick of art at the moment—humored him.

"Oh, Marietta, it *was* kind of you!" Virginia said in a hasty aside, indicating that she appreciated all that had been done to make her impromptu tea party a success.

"There was nothing but the cake," Marietta replied, scowling. "No bread, no butter, no *confiture*."

"I know," said Virginia. "I was so late getting through this afternoon."

She was telling herself that as soon as Nevill had gone she would have to fly out to the shops, and by this time there'd be nothing whatever left. She gave but half an ear to the conversation between Nevill and her husband. It didn't seem real that Nevill should be here. The fact of it would have hurt her too much. If she could only succeed in pretending that it was merely a dream! She did dream of him frequently, just as in the old days she used to dream of Nicholas.

Surreptitiously Lonny Collins, glared at by his daughter, jogged the baby on his knees, and made little clicking noises meant to divert the infant. Bit by bit he worked his chair away from the table, and he ate nothing. But Marietta sat up in a genteel fashion, cut her bread and butter into small pieces, and crooked her little finger as she raised her teacup. Over the edge of it her sloe-black eyes, when they weren't abusing

Lonny, wandered from Nevill Davies to Nicholas Wayne. She had something of her jockey father's hard-bitten expression, although Lonny was a kindly person and Marietta was not.

Virginia nervously sought to propitiate her, but it wasn't to be done. By this time she ought to have known that some things never can be accomplished; but the stubborn, persistent streak in Virginia rendered her blind to failure. Perhaps some day she would wear down Marietta's remarkable resistance. Anyway, now and again she would keep on trying.

Nevill and Nicholas got up.

"I'm going to show him the burning bush," said Nicholas, referring with heavy humor to the beard of *monsieur le docteur*. "Coming along, Jinny?"

She tagged behind them, rather ignored. This *must* be a dream, she thought, as she picked a belated rosebud that was striving to bloom, and thrust it into her dress.

The perfume of the rose, though faint, was real. The declining sun had a familiar aspect, and so had the little church across the meadows. And that nervously alert man in the gray suit, nodding abruptly, and talking nonsense about painting to Nicholas, was too real for comfort's sake. Oh, why did Nevill come here? Could it give either of them any joy to meet again? Only pain—only anguish!

"This is where I work when I'm at home," Nicholas was saying, flinging open the double doors of the converted garage. "There's my latest masterpiece."

He pointed to the portrait of the doctor, who smirked benignly from the glistening canvas. A more meretricious bit of painting scarcely existed, and Nicholas—sardonic, grimly humorous Nicholas Wayne—knew it. He carried his joke so far as to pretend to be a little proud of such an achievement, almost as if he had said:

"Jinny has married a great artist, while you—pooh, you are only a rich young baronet! That's why she jilted you."

"The beard and the watch chain gave me considerable trouble," he said in a deeply serious tone. "You wouldn't believe it, Sir Nevill, but watch chains are the very dickens to paint. I'll have you observe the details of that Masonic charm. Somewhat in the old Dutch style, eh?"

Nevill hesitated and cleared his throat.

"Well, yes—of course I don't know very much, but—"

"Don't be silly, Nicholas," Virginia said a little sharply. "Why not tell Nevill the truth? He *hates* it, Nevill; only we need the money."

"Not to mention the potatoes," jeered Nicholas.

"I was wondering," Nevill began, fumbling clumsily in his mind for some way out of this impasse, "if you'd care to dine with me one night at the International Club?"

He *must* discover some means of helping Virginia, and he saw now that it was only to be done through her husband. Could he possibly make friends with the churl? Could he bring himself to attempt so distasteful a task? Even then he couldn't offer Wayne money. Perhaps Molly could be induced to have her portrait painted, if it cost her nothing. Only, if this was a fair specimen of the man's work, heaven help Molly!

Nicholas considered the invitation to dine. He glanced sidewise at Virginia, who appeared to be dreamily indifferent. Those shadowy eyes of hers dwelt upon the little gray church across the meadows, as if in spirit she was equally far removed.

"Thanks," Nicholas said finally, his manner abrupt and definite. "I haven't the clothes to invade the International."

"Oh, anywhere you choose," Nevill put in. "Chiostro was saying he'd like to see you again."

"I see Chiostro as often as I care to." Now Nicholas was being rude. "No, it's very kind of you, I'm sure, but I don't often get into Paris. Thanks, all the same, for asking me."

It was conveyed to Nevill that he had stayed long enough, and he took his departure without returning to the cottage. He shook hands with both of them, and Virginia said that she was glad to have seen him; but neither asked him to come again.

XVII

VIRGINIA still further delayed her marketing until there could be no question of running into Nevill in the town, although her errands would not take her into the neighborhood of the station. She had a panicky fear of seeing him again.

It seemed to her that in her life she had had to reckon with more people than her strength could stand. If others found it hard to bend Virginia to their will, it was just as hard, from her point of view, to get them to understand her motives. She believed that her intentions were always good;

yet Nevill had disappointed her by not understanding, and now she feared a secret conflict with Nicholas.

There was also Marietta Collins. The girl gave her an uncanny, creepy feeling of slyness. She might have thought queer things, seeing Virginia standing there crying, with Nevill holding her hands. Perhaps it was just as well Marietta interrupted when she did.

After Nevill had gone, Virginia turned abruptly and went into the house. Marietta was washing up the tea things, and Lonny, under his daughter's acid directions, was preparing the baby for bed.

"Look how ye're letting the kid's head hang down! Can't you hold 'er on a pillow? That's right, drop 'er little sock into the wash basin. That's the way to do it! 'Ere, give that kid to me!"

"I'm getting on all right," whimpered Lonny. "Go away! Wash the dishes!"

"I'll fetch a fresh pair of socks," Virginia said, coming upon this scene while it was in full blast. "It's so kind of you both to help me. Why, she's half asleep already! Lonny, you're a wonder with that baby—you really are! She's as good as gold with you."

Here was where Virginia tripped badly. In praising Lonny, seemingly at the expense of Marietta, she had done an unfortunate thing. Marietta went on with the dishes, turning her back. There was no reason at all why she should be doing Virginia's work, but perhaps the excitement of the afternoon made it difficult for her to seek the quiet of her own apartments.

Virginia threw a shawl over her shoulders and got her rush basket. Then she hesitated for a moment. She must ask Nicholas for some money, and he was still outside in the studio. She didn't want to see Nicholas alone just now—not until he had got over the little fit of bad temper she had felt was coming on.

Still, to-morrow was Sunday, and the marketing had to be done. The best thing was to be brisk with Nicholas, and pretend that nothing had happened. Nothing had happened, beyond the unexpected dropping in of an old—friend.

So she went bravely out to the converted garage, to extort money from her husband. Nicholas had drawn a canvas deck chair to the door, and was sprawled in it with an idle, morose air; but he looked meditative rather than bad-tempered.

"Nico, can you let me have twenty francs?" she asked.

She was all ready for a question as to what she had done with the twenty she had had on Wednesday. Eight francs of that sum had gone for cleaning and pressing his one decent suit.

Nicholas didn't ask the usual question, however. He merely put his hand in his pocket and gave her the money. This seemed almost unfriendly, and she began to tell him about the suit, whereat he testily exclaimed:

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, go away, Jinny! I don't want to hear your troubles. I've got a few of my own!"

She flushed and thanked him hastily for the money. He was in a bad temper, after all.

As the gate clicked behind her, Nicholas suddenly put his hands to his face, and a little moaning sound welled up from his throat. Should he boldly offer to do a portrait of the doctor's wife, full satisfaction guaranteed, and take it out in medical attendance for himself?

The pain in his side had been nearly unbearable to-day; but if he made such a bargain, Jinny would naturally want to know what he was being paid for it. He felt that just now he would rather die than have her suspect that he was suffering from one of the attacks which had seized him periodically ever since the time when, at the age of seventeen, they had told him at the hospital that there was nothing further to be done, and had let him go. He didn't want Jinny to know; yet if that Davies fellow hadn't come in gallivanting this afternoon, he might have told her.

She had never had to endure him in one of his attacks. Since his marriage he had been so much better, so much happier—which probably had a lot to do with it. As for poverty, Nicholas had never known anything else, and it hadn't worried him on Virginia's account. Her placid acceptance of the sort of life he could offer her had lulled any apprehensions on the subject, and until to-day he had almost forgotten that she had been bred in extreme comfort.

He was groaning and muttering to himself, when a sixth sense suddenly informed him that he was not alone, and he looked up to see Marietta Collins standing before him. She had come softly over the grass, or else his preoccupation had deadened the sound of her approach.

And it was a transfigured Marietta who looked down on him—a Marietta that Lony and Virginia would have been puzzled to recognize. Her sulky, attractive mouth quivered, her small black eyes melted into a devouring, hungry wistfulness.

"Oh, I don't wonder!" she blurted out, mistaking the fundamental cause of Nicholas's anguish. "It makes the damnable thing altogether! Lazy, deceitful—even now running after him, I suppose, in her blue silk dress. Oh, Mr. Wayne, it fair breaks the heart of me, that it does!"

"What are you talking about?" Nicholas asked dully.

"About 'er, that's who. I guess you know all about it, too. Plain enough, my poor dear! I caught 'em fair and square, I did—holding hands and crying on each other's shoulders. Friends! I know the world. I didn't always live in St. Cloud!"

It finally dawned upon Nicholas that all this vituperation was directed at Virginia.

"Are you talking about my wife?" he asked.

Marietta's lips closed with the effect of a click. Somehow she had blundered. Her sympathy wasn't appreciated—the tone of his voice told her that.

As she made no reply, Nicholas went on:

"Because, if you are, you're wasting your breath. Save it for something really useful—nagging your father, for instance. I'm sure he appreciates your interference more than I do!"

Marietta flushed an unbecoming color that warred with her brilliant hair. She was unversed in subtlety, although naturally sly. It had seemed to her that Nicholas was in a mood to appreciate consolation. Of course, she didn't know about the stinging pain in his side.

"I don't want to interfere," she said, relapsing into her everyday manner. "It's no business of mine, really."

"I'm glad you see that," Nicholas agreed.

He closed his eyes, and Marietta, after a moment's indecision, left him. She wondered what would come of her boldness. Would Mr. Wayne tell his wife? Obviously he didn't believe that Mrs. Wayne and the young English gentleman were more friendly than was apparent on the surface. How easily men were fooled! The more worthless the wife, the more readily did the husband allow himself to be tricked.

Half blinded with angry tears, Marietta went up to her neat little room and attacked

the amply proportioned blouse she was in process of cutting out for the mayor's wife. Her scissors sliced viciously through the stiff black brocade. She jabbed in pins, fitted her handiwork together, and basted. She got up once to light the lamp, and a second time to listen at the head of the stairs, when Virginia returned. She heard Virginia moving about downstairs, but there was no conversation, so it must be that Mr. Wayne was still in his studio.

At eight o'clock Marietta laid out a snack of supper for her father, who might or might not eat it when he came in, and went back to her sewing again. After a long, long time she heard a door open, then slam violently. That wasn't her father's way of entering, even when he was tipsy. Years of experience had developed a manner of elaborate caution in Lonny. He might stumble, but he never slammed doors.

Then there was the crash of a heavy object falling.

Marietta got up again and went to the head of the stairs, holding her breath for fear of missing the slightest sound. Her heart was going *drum, drum, drum*, with a queer, vibrant beat that shook her whole body.

Perhaps Mr. Wayne had only pretended to be indifferent to her bit of news. Perhaps he had fortified himself with drink, and was now killing his wife. A terrible little tragedy in this cottage! They would take him to a jail, and very likely guillotine him, and then she—Marietta—would take care of Cherry and bring her up as her own.

Drum, drum, drum—what heartbeats! She drew in a gasping breath as there was a swift rush across the room below, a rustle of skirts—the blue silk dress, doubtless—and the door at the bottom of the stairs opened. Virginia stood there, not murdered as yet, but deathly pale. She seemed more relieved than surprised to find Marietta gaping down at her.

"Oh, Marietta, go for the doctor, quick!" she cried. "Quick, quick! Something has happened to my husband. I think he's dead!"

Marietta flew down the stairs in a marvelous fashion, considering her high heels.

XVIII

NICHOLAS lay on the stone floor of the kitchen. His face was marble white, a lock of hair straggled across his forehead. Of

course, he was considerably taller now than he had been at the age of twelve, but to Virginia's horrified gaze he looked exactly the same as he had seventeen years ago, when she and the others left him for dead under the cherry tree. As on that former occasion, she had a strong impulse to run away and leave him to his unknown fate; but this time she only ran as far as the stairs, to call Marietta.

As quick as lightning, the curious sequence of their lives flashed across her mental vision. Over and over again, in her childhood dreams, she had killed Nicholas. And now—was this the final answer?

She had been in the bedroom, just about to take off her festive dress and don something more practical, after which it was her intention to fry a couple of the chops she had brought home and serve them up, with bread and butter and coffee, for their evening meal.

Nicholas sometimes went into the town on Saturday nights, but he always returned by nine o'clock, and as he never drank there was no cause for apprehension on that score. Nevertheless, she had been anxious about him ever since Nevill left—worried lest he should start abusing her about Nevill, worried for fear he might think that she was dissatisfied or unhappy because of the contrast of prosperity their visitor had presented. Nicholas hadn't been quite himself when he handed over that money to her, and she had winced under his cutting remark about having troubles of his own.

As she moved about the bedroom, she told herself that Nicholas mustn't know that she was really suffering. It was quite unnecessary to hurt him. Enough that she herself was cruelly hurt, and that poor Nevill—but no, she mustn't think about Nevill. It shook her too much. It started up such a violent trembling that she couldn't control the movements of her hands.

Then Nicholas had come in, and the door slammed behind him, as if banged by a great gust of wind. She rushed to see, and there was Nicholas, lurching, swaying, the sticks with which he helped himself fallen out of his hands. Before she could do anything—it all happened in a second—he had lunged forward, grasped at a chair in a useless effort to save himself, and crashed to the floor, where he lay as still as the stone itself.

It came over Virginia, in that painful flash of mental anguish, that somehow she

was responsible for this, just as she had somehow been responsible for the accident of long ago. Now, as then, she had anticipated trouble before it actually happened. She had *known* that something was going to happen!

"Is he dead?" she whispered, as Marietta dropped to her knees beside the still form.

Marietta put an arm under Nicholas's head as carefully as if he had been little Cherry, and laid her face against his breast.

"He's not dead," she said, after listening a moment. Then she sniffed with an air of knowing suspicion. "But he's been drinking." She wanted to add: "And serve you jolly well right!"

"Drinking!" Virginia shuddered. "Oh, no, Marietta—that's impossible! Mr. Wayne never drinks."

"He has been drinking," repeated Marietta. "You can smell it on his breath—cognac. If you'll kindly fetch a pillow, Mrs. Wayne, we'll put it under his head, and then I'll go for the doctor, although it's my opinion that a little cold water and hot coffee 'll do the trick all right. Not being used to it, and on an empty stummick, and being worried and all—"

What did Marietta mean by Nicholas's being worried?

Virginia brought the pillow, and insisted that Marietta should bring the doctor, in spite of her villainous optimism as to the trivial cause of the seizure.

The doctor came quickly through the gap in the hedge, and about the same time Lonny Collins appeared, a little drunk himself, but no more so than usual, and perfectly competent to help. Marietta took the sleeping baby upstairs to her own room, and Nicholas was carried into the bedroom, partially disrobed, and examined.

He had certainly been drinking. The doctor cheerfully backed up Marietta's diagnosis to that extent; but there was something beyond that unpleasant fact to account for the sufferer's condition. He seemed to be in pain, and groaned a great deal as he came to. Virginia was asked to leave him alone with the doctor and Lonny.

Marietta had brought down her lamp and her sewing, and sat stitching with rapid jerks, her face unusually pale and set. Occasionally she glanced at Virginia, who, after a futile turn or two about the room, had slumped down on the couch. She sat there, apathetically staring at the maga-

zine cover sketch of herself, just as Nevill had done a few hours ago, her clenched hands between her knees, her shoulders sagging forward.

"What a helpless, useless woman!" thought Marietta. "Why doesn't she do something—cook herself some supper? I suppose she thinks that if she waits long enough, I'll offer to do it for her. Well!"

Marietta laid aside the mayor's wife's blouse, and drummed impatiently on the table with her thimble.

"Well!" This time she said it aloud. "Shall I get you some supper, Mrs. Wayne?"

Virginia started.

"No—oh, no, thank you! I couldn't eat anything; but it's awfully kind of you, Marietta."

"Not at all," murmured Marietta, hating herself for her kindness. "I think you'd better. It would be no trouble—no trouble at all. What were you going to have?"

Virginia shook her head and struggled with a lump in her throat.

"It's—it's—awfully kind of you. No, I don't want any supper."

"Don't you think you *ought* to?" Marietta said, her voice hoarsely cold. "The baby, you know."

"Oh, yes! Well, just as you like." Virginia sighed deeply. "But wait until we hear what the doctor says. I may have to go out for something."

"Dad will go, or I will. You sit just where you are, Mrs. Wayne. I don't see what all this fuss is about—having the doctor and all, just because a gentleman takes a drop too much."

As if he had heard himself mentioned and was responding like a jack-in-the-box, the bushy-bearded doctor popped out of the bedroom, quick but quiet. He closed the door behind him with extreme caution.

"*Madame*, your husband is very ill," he announced gravely. "I must send for a nursing sister. Very ill indeed is your poor husband."

Virginia got up and went to meet the doctor. To Marietta's intense disgust, she gave him her hands to pat.

"But, after all, it may not be so serious as one fears," he added, patting those poor reddened hands in a comforting fashion.

"What is it?" Virginia asked.

"An old trouble, he tells me. He's been more or less in pain for several days, but

he hoped it would pass away. He didn't like to trouble you."

Virginia released herself and edged toward the door of the bedroom. Then she hesitated.

"What shall I do for him, doctor?" she asked, with the air of helplessness that drove Marietta to inward fury.

"Just sit beside him until the sister comes. I'm sending Collins to the chemist's for some morphia. To-morrow morning we will look into it thoroughly. I may require another opinion."

"You mean a specialist?"

"Perhaps," said the doctor.

As Virginia went into the bedroom, Lonny tiptoed out, sidling past her with a look of deep commiseration.

It was not a very large room, and, like the kitchen, none too well furnished. The bed took up a great deal of the space, and in one corner was the baby's soap box crib on two chairs. It also contained another chair, fetched from the kitchen for the doctor, and a combination washing stand and chest of drawers.

Nicholas was awake when his wife entered. She sat down in the chair which had been brought for the doctor.

"Nico, dear, are you in pain?" she asked, stroking his forehead lightly.

He made an effort to smile, resulting in an unpleasant facial distortion like the grimace of a fiend.

"Somewhat," he replied.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" she cried softly.

"There wasn't any use."

She touched his hand, but he drew it sharply away.

"Do you hate me, Nico?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so. I don't know. Perhaps I do."

He ground his teeth, but did not quite succeed in suppressing the groan.

"Because I—because you're suffering from that old hurt? Oh, Nico, if only I could suffer for you!"

She slipped to her knees beside the bed and began to pray in a curious fashion, begging God to let her take Nicholas's pain into her own body. She seemed to believe that if she voiced her desire earnestly enough, the thing would happen.

"Get up, Jinny! Don't do that. I can't bear it. Get up—get up!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry! Isn't there *anything* I can do?" Virginia groveled there, her

face wet and swollen with tears, her hands picking at the bedclothes in a dreary, futile fashion. "Oh, dear God, let me do *something!*"

Marietta, glittering of eye, catlike, stood in the doorway.

"You'd better come away, Mrs. Wayne," she said, with fiercely restrained passion. "You're only making him worse."

"Yes, go away. Please go away," Nicholas groaned. "Go away, both of you. I want to be alone. I *beg* of you to leave me alone!"

Again Virginia had failed, and this time she could indeed hold herself severely to blame. She needn't have broken down like that and added to Nicholas's burden. She pulled herself sharply together and motioned Marietta to leave the room; but she did not go herself, even though Nicholas had ordered her to do so.

His white face was beady with perspiration, and she got a clean handkerchief out of a drawer and moistened it with some eau de Cologne—the remnants of a bottle he had given her during their honeymoon—and gently dabbed his forehead and lips with it. His eyes were half closed now. Perhaps he didn't realize that she was still there.

It seemed almost no time before Lonny returned from the chemist's. The doctor came again, and gave Nicholas a hypodermic that soon sent him to sleep. Then the sister arrived from the convent, looking like an angel of mercy in her flowing habit, but not exactly Virginia's idea of a hospital nurse.

All night the sister sat by Nicholas, telling her beads, while he slept his drugged sleep. Marietta kept the baby upstairs, and Virginia sat or lay on the couch in the kitchen, according to her fancy. Sometimes she got up and walked about.

There would be a consultation about Nicholas in the morning. She wondered what the doctors would decide must be done; and whatever they decided, how was it to be done? Her thoughts ran in an agonizing circle from ways and means to the pain and suffering of Nicholas, and around again to the financial problem. That was the cruelest of all—their poverty.

One knows that in such anguish Virginia would passionately deny that she herself mattered in the least; but Nicholas and the baby did matter. She had to think for them both; and thinking alone wouldn't

help the situation. It became a problem of what she could do.

Marietta Collins would have told her that she could do nothing, because she was so utterly incapable. She couldn't even scrub a floor properly. Yet she would have to do something—*something!*

Gradually the long night passed. At dawn, Marietta crept down with the baby in her arms, and relinquished her to Virginia. Little Cherry was fretful, and it was a task to keep her quiet. Marietta made coffee for the sister and gave Virginia some.

Sunday morning! The church bells rang out for mass. Up crept the sun. The baby cried and would not be comforted. Marietta said that as soon as the milkman came, they must try feeding her with the bottle.

Meanwhile they must wrap her up in a shawl and take her into the garden, so that Mr. Wayne shouldn't be disturbed any more than was necessary.

How weirdly gray and lifeless Virginia looked on that chill October morning, as she walked to and fro in the damp grass, mechanically trying to soothe her hungry, fretful child, holding Cherry against her shoulder, patting the writhing little back! She seemed a vague, shadowy semblance of a woman, like some wraith escaped from the churchyard's coldly comforting embrace to go back to a world of pain and suffering. Her very face was gray, with bluish hollows under the eyes. In sharp contrast, the sun caught the gold of her disordered hair and gave it the mocking similitude of a halo.

(To be continued in the June number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE WINGS OF BEAUTY

WHICH holds her deepest glory, sky or earth?

The flower from dust mysteriously drawn,

Or the rose crystal of an arctic dawn?

From what transition has she wilder birth?

Often she comes unheard—as often flees.

A little while she haunts, where sunsets rest,

A cold, pure space of emerald in the west,

Or shadowed water under quiet trees.

Upon what heavens would you see her fly?

Over the soundless meadows of the snow,

Or where the winter stars as whitely glow,

That follow April sunsets down the sky?

Her vision is by darkness or by day;

The burning poppies splendid in the noon

Summon her face, or ember of the moon,

Setting the clouds a-smolder far away.

What gift of hers is dearest at the last?

Margins of morning dipped in fading fire,

Or autumn lying on her golden pyre,

Or marble molded in the choric past?

The dewdrop and the ocean share the sun,

By whose creative light we find access

To this fragility of loveliness—

These fleeting homes of an Eternal One!

George Sterling

The City of Refuge

THE STORY OF SELWYN ROSS, AN AMERICAN IN FRANCE, AND
HIS WAR BRIDE

By Perceval Gibbon

THE autumn sun was warm upon the stir of the boulevards as Selwyn Ross returned to his little hotel near the Madeleine to fetch his six-weeks-married wife for lunch. The trees along the sidewalks were touched with russet and bronze, and the throng of the splendid streets was colored like a smudged palette. The stimulant of its brightness and briskness was upon his senses as he crossed the threshold into that dim atmosphere of sloven disrepute in which the little hotel nurtured its character of prim respectability.

Selwyn had noted it before with a vague distaste, but now it was like a rebuff to the morning freshness with which he had come upon his way. He had spent a couple of hours at the offices of the American relief organization with which he was connected. Perhaps, too, he made an unconscious comparison between their neat, airy rooms, the acute and vital personalities of those who used them—crisp men and women like cut crystals—and all the used and dreary character, the odors, the airlessness, the ingenious inconveniences, of the little hotel.

"Place smells like a stale saloon," he said to himself discontentedly, as he mounted the narrow, winding staircase with its ragged matting, and with the slop pails standing still unemptied outside the doors.

At his own door he paused for a couple of seconds. He was aware of a sourness in his temper, and made a conscious effort to be rid of it. Then he knocked punctiliously. Selwyn Ross had all those decorative little decencies which are to the virtues of a man what cleanliness in the house is to those of a dog.

A sound like the chirp of a drowsy bird answered him from within. He turned the handle, entered, and stood staring.

It was a smallish room, with a single, curtain-asphyxiated window and a dumpy double bed. A red-covered table, with two plush chairs and a settee, made up most of the rest of its equipment, and a tiny *cabinet de toilette* opened from it. At its best it could only have been a stuffy, ill lit, and ill ventilated little cell; but now a real anger surged in him as he looked at it.

Smoke, pearly gray smoke, in slow-moving wreaths and ribands, swung lazily upon the dead air of the chamber. It stood between him and the bed in an actual mist. Ends of cigarettes littered the faded splendors of the carpet; and the smell of it all, with its suggestion of dirt and dissipation, was a new taint in the place.

"Ah! What time is it, Selwyn?"

In the middle of the dumpy bed, sprawling in a disorder of bedclothes, with a printed abomination in red and blue upon her lap and a cigarette miraculously pendent from her lip, lay Toto, the six-weeks-married wife of Selwyn Ross. Her face, with the black hair swathed about the brows to be out of the way, smiled at him from the heaped pillows in a mere animal contentment of languor. Her nightgown had slipped down on one side, and a smooth shoulder lay bare. It gave her the look of an odalisque, of a femininity passive and self-sufficient.

Selwyn Ross closed the door behind him and tossed his hat upon the settee.

"It's one o'clock," he said carefully. "I thought you'd be ready by now."

She smiled again, without moving, and suddenly he was goaded to speaking with no care at all.

"Hang it all, Toto!" he said. "This place—why, look at it! It's enough to poison a man. And dirt—look at all these butts you've been throwing around! What

d'you reckon the hotel people are goin' to think of us? And here you are, at one o'clock on a fine day like this—"

"Selween!"

The girl slipped the interruption in with what seemed like a practiced deftness. He halted, the thread of his thought severed.

"Well?" he demanded sulkily.

She spat the cigarette from her lip to the floor, rolled upon her side, and reached one slow arm toward him. It was like a motion in a dance, so measured, so intentional in its grace and provocation.

"I am bad, lazy girl," said Toto. "Come kiss me!"

Ross made a brief sound under his breath, hesitated for a fraction of an instant, and then obeyed. He went to the bedside and bent toward the piquant, sun-ripened face, with the strange sophistication of its smile smeared like an unguent upon childlike lips. The firm, warm arms received him and drew him down.

"Toto, you little devil!" he half laughed, when he came to the surface again.

She laughed, too, and released him.

"Now I get up," she announced.

"Quick I get up. You see, Selween!"

She jerked herself to a sitting posture and fumbled under the bolster. Ross walked to the window, to inspect his nails. He glanced back over his shoulder to see her bring forth a tight black ball, which unrolled with a crackle as of paper and became a long black stocking. She plunged her arm into it and drew forth her treasury—a wad of pink and blue notes of the Bank of France. With a kick and a drag and a slap of elastic garter, she put the stocking on. Then, as the next step in her toilet, she deftly slipped the wad of notes under the garter and reached for the other stocking.

Ross smiled a little wearily. What had seemed curious and interesting in the first days of the honeymoon was becoming merely indecorous in the daylight of married life.

"I wish you wouldn't carry your money like that, Toto," he said. "Nobody else does it, and you've got that nice bag we bought you the other day."

She looked up at him with a touch of wonder.

"Plenty girls in Marseilles do that," she answered. "Nobody can't pick your stocking; but if you don't like, Selween—"

A little shrug of indulgent surrender

completed the sentence. The money came to the light again, and she carried it with her into the *cabinet de toilette* to finish dressing.

II

Ross grimaced faintly as she departed, then frowned swiftly as he realized what he was doing. He was one of those men of no particular racial or social type who look about thirty years of age from the twenties to the forties. He was fair in hue, comely enough without being handsome, neat as a new doll, with no strong enthusiasms and no vice save ignorance.

It had happened to him to serve, quite worthily, with the American Y. M. C. A. during the war. In the drag of that indiscriminating syphon that sucked its stream of individualities from so many sources and spilled them forth upon so many new levels, he had run across Toto. *Cantinière* behind the French lines, untrained nurse in divers makeshift hospitals, barmaid in an "American bar" in a town that melted while one watched under the incessant shelling, she had gravitated at last to the "Y." There she had washed dishes, shirts, and floors, and had cooked and sewed, always with her manner of faint amusement that those about her should take serious things seriously.

There were no two opinions as to her loveliness. Kneeling beside a pail, with an old gunnysack for an apron, a scrubbing brush in her hand, she had only to lift the glow of her face, the slow regard of her eyes, and the allure of her lips, to startle most men like a revelation. Ross had not been without rivals.

He knew nearly nothing of her when they married. She belonged to Marseilles, she said, and he did not know Marseilles. She seemed to have no living relatives.

Once he had asked if she would like to revisit Marseilles before the time came for them to sail to the United States. It was in the first days of their marriage. They sat together in a lovers' solitude upon the *terrasse* of a riverside café, and watched the Seine rippling in gold under a high moon. He had her hands in his. The wonder of her beauty, and a sense of adventuring into the mystery and strangeness of her woman's mind, moved him strongly.

"Shall I take you to Marseilles, then?" he pressed her.

She had not answered at first. She

seemed to ponder. Then, suddenly, she laughed and drew her hands free.

"You!" she said.

He was startled at her tone, for a raw and cruel contempt sounded in the word. She softened instantly.

"Ah, my honey!" she begged, loading her English words with the throaty richness of her southern voice. "Marseilles—you don't know it; never you can't know it! Only the Cannebière an' the cathedral an' Not' Dame de la Garde—all those preety things you can know."

She spat. To spit was rather a noticeable gesture of hers.

"But those preety things—I don't care about them. Round by the *port*, where a lot of little dirty streets jump up from the water, full of China boys an' niggers an' Italians an' Sout' Americans an' soldiers what desert—like that is how I know Marseilles. When I want to kill you"—she laughed and gave him her hands again—"I know a man—two, three men—what cut your throat for two francs, glass of cognac, one kiss, an' your clo'es. You want to take me back there, Selween?"

"For the Lord's sake!" he cried. "What were you doing in a place like that?"

"Work," she replied placidly. "Same as in Y. Born there. It is"—she paused to remember the acquired phrase—"it is my home town."

He learned, in subsequent talk, little more that was enlightening. He was glad there were no living relatives, though.

III

SHE came forth at last to the bedroom, duly dressed for the street, and passed across the room to where a tall mirror, blotched with spots like rust, hung upon the wall, receiving from the window such light as the curtains could spare.

In her blue coat and skirt and her little close-clinging blue hat she was a figure of sheer delight, dainty, trim, and d'stinguished. Ross watched her as she moved and turned before the glass, and reached for his hat. He knew what was coming.

"You look just lovely, Toto," he said. "I wouldn't shift a thing, if I were you. Let's go!"

She smiled at him.

"You like me, Selween?" she murmured, and then she did it.

It was like a silly miracle, like the transmutation of gold into dross. Her hands

were pressed to her trim waist. She gave a twist and a hitch, and the neat perfect skirt changed shape. She put the tip of her forefinger to the rim of her hat above her ear, and canted it a fraction of an inch. Forthwith the demure Parisienne had vanished, burned up and obliterated in the challenge and flaunt of a flaming Marseillaise. The girl was the same, the clothes were the same; but the difference of the sum of them was that of the mellow autumn light of Paris and the tyrannous glare of the Cannebière.

"You see?" she said to Ross.

"You bet I see!" he answered. "And now let's feed."

Ross would have lunched at a Duval, but Toto preferred a steamy little backstreet restaurant of her acquaintance, and prevailed on him to go thither. He had been there before, and disliked the place. There was an intimacy about it from which he felt himself excluded. The *patron* was not fatherly to Ross, as he was to other customers, nor the waiter brotherly; but Toto they accepted without question.

"Now, Selween!" They were seated at a table in the lace-screened window, Toto had the *menu*, and the waiter, all smiles of complaisance and approval, stood at her elbow. "I pick you a nice big lunch—yes? I am hungry, too. I don't get up at eight o'clock an' go out an' eat beefsteak. Well, now!"

She relapsed into machine-gun French beyond his power to follow. The waiter smirked his friendly understanding, and offered suggestions. Toto received each one gravely, and evidently accepted one.

"What have you ordered?" questioned Ross. "What I'd like is just a chop—"

She shook her head with a seriousness that was not more than half assumed.

"You see!" she answered. "Here is not the place for chops. I give you a little meal all nice and good, like I want myself. The *chef* here, he is Marseillais."

"Oh, hell!" said Ross, and resigned himself.

There arrived eventually a porridge of a soup, colored with saffron to the hue of a quarantine flag, submerging large, flabby fragments of an unidentifiable fish. There followed a red-hot ragout with largish bones in it—hare's or rabbit's, but they reminded Ross of a baby's. Then came a soft cheese, in a condition to be drunk from cups, and finally the respite of coffee.

He made a miserable meal. Opposite to him Toto ate in her own fashion, and he watched her uncomfortably. It was not that her table manners were bad or unsightly; it was merely that she took her food with a sort of frank gusto that matched the tilt of her hat and the flamboyance of her gait—an animalism as natural and innocent as that of a puppy with a bone.

"Not nice, Selween?" she inquired, when the worst was over.

"Not a bit!" he answered irritably. "Next time I want a chop, I'm going to have one, Toto! That soup was a yellow peril, and the stew made me think of the Morgue. Let's have the bill and get into the fresh air!"

She smiled assentingly.

"Walk?" she inquired. "Us both go to the Bois an' walk in the trees? You like that?"

"All right," he agreed.

Toto took the bill from the waiter, scanned it, and passed it as correct. Ross glanced at the total and reached for his pocketbook.

"Eh?" he said sharply.

He removed his hand from his breast pocket and examined his other pockets. The waiter stood behind Toto, watching her husband, with a hint of a smile on his countenance. Ross felt himself reddening.

"What's the matter, Selween?" drawled Toto. "You forget your money?"

"Looks like it," he admitted. "Did you bring that bag of yours, Toto?" She shook her head. "Then you'd better stay here while I get a cab and go and fetch some cash."

He made to rise. The waiter was smiling broadly, and Ross was angrily aware of an instinct to cringe before him. Every debtor is a slave.

"But, Selween," protested Toto, "I got plenty money. I give you now—yes?"

She pushed back her chair and bent forward, reaching downward. Her hands were out of sight behind the table, but what she was doing was plain. He heard the swish of her skirt and the well known flop of the elastic, and she came up again with her crumpled wad of pink and blue money in her hand.

"Plenty there!" she remarked, as she passed it to him.

The waiter departed to get change.

"I thought—" began Ross.

Toto leaned over the table to him, her face alight with merriment.

"Ah, Selween!" she said. "I can't bring that nice bag—no. Me, I have not used to carry bags; surely I lose him! For why? Because I lost him somewhere—don't know where—already. So when you say you don't like those money in that stocking, I take him out; but afterward I put him back in the other stocking. You glad—yes?"

He was not glad at all. A cumulative ill humor had hold of him, and this was another grievance for it to fatten upon. Only his habit of self-control enabled him to return her smile and answer lightly.

"You bet I'm glad!" he lied. "I'll buy you a new bag for that, Toto, and have it chained to you. I didn't like the way that waiter was grinning one little bit."

"Him?" Toto tossed her head. "I don't think he grin. Nice feller—he lend you money for pay the bill, if you ask him. Too much 'fraid of me for grin at you!"

"Afraid of you, Toto?"

There was a meaning in her look which he failed to perceive.

"You think," she said, "a man can't be 'fraid of me?"

"I couldn't," he said with assurance. "I could be—oh, heaps of things; but I couldn't be scared of you."

He laughed shortly, and perhaps in his laugh there sounded something of derision. He tossed the remainder of the notes across to her, and rose. Again she gave him that look of veiled significance, but she did not answer in words.

IV

WITHOUT, the afternoon fulfilled the promise of the morning. As they drove toward the Bois, the world was warm with a great dull flush of unclouded autumn sun, through which one flavored, like a drop of wormwood in wine, the brisk chill of approaching winter. Toto glowed to it. Vivid before, she became, with the wind roses aflame in her face, a sheer conflagration of effect. People walking beside the way stopped and stared after her. Ross had some of the feelings of one who is included, against his will, in a circus parade.

"Hadh't you better lean back a bit, Toto?" he suggested.

She was sitting bolt upright in her place, smiling about her. She shook her head.

"All these peoples think, when they see

me: 'Who is that gran' lady?' I like that, Selween!"

"Well, I don't," he snapped. "Sit back, Toto!"

She obeyed at once. They did not speak again till the *fiacre* halted and they alighted on the fringe of the Bois. She had ceased to smile now, but once or twice, as if pricked by a thought, she turned and glanced at his unresponsive face.

It was in that manner of companionship that they walked together along the *allée* between the little trees, all of the same age and the same height, which make up the Bois de Boulogne. Ross was angry with himself, but failed to find words to adjust matters. Toto was quiet, and seemed to be pondering.

They turned aside, still in silence, to walk upon the grass; and it was then, when the roadway was behind them and a taste of woodland quiet about them—the stage set for a pastoral of reconciliation—that the strain tautened to the breaking point.

"Selween!" said Toto suddenly, and stood still.

"Eh?" said Ross. "What is it now?"

They fronted each other. She lifted her face to his primly set countenance, rigid with contained ill temper, and he might have seen, had he looked, that her eyes were soft and humble. In all her lore of men she knew but one manner of appeal, and she was appealing now.

"Don't be cross, honey," she said, in those low tones of hers. "I am silly girl. Kiss me!"

She came close to him, and raised her hands, to rest them on his shoulders. Nothing in him responded to her. He turned his face away in irresistible impatience and irritation, and saw, between the rows of trees, what he thought was his deliverance approaching.

"Hush, Toto! Don't!" he said hastily. "Here's some one coming!"

He turned away from her toward the little lady who came gayly, like a well fed fairy, across the leaf-littered turf.

It was a Mrs. Hague, the wife of one of the embassy staff, whom he had met here and there upon various official and unofficial occasions. She was a personage in her way, less by virtue of her husband's position than of her own debonair and effervescent personality. She had the sparkle of a vintage champagne, as against the drowsy richness of poor Toto's southern

glow. In her tweed skirt and woolen jacket, with her muffler swinging loose below her chin, and her face wise and daring below her cap, she was the image of all that outwardness which Ross could have desired in a wife of his.

He moved to meet her, raising his hat as he went. Two paces behind his elbow Toto followed.

"Why, Mr. Ross!" greeted the little lady cheerily. "You here!"

She gave him her hand, welcoming him with her impish smile. He took it and bowed over it.

It was at that moment that Mrs. Hague, looking past him curiously at Toto, perceived something that was hidden from Toto's husband. She said afterward that she felt as if a flame from hell's fire had spouted up and scorched her.

Ross saw her smile wither away.

"But—" she stammered. "But—this lady—"

Selwyn Ross had no time to introduce his newly wedded wife. A hand fell on his arm just above the elbow, like a blow, and gripped. A fierce jerk tore him halfway around, to face Toto—not the Toto he had married, but a Toto he had never seen before.

The cock of the hat, the flare of the skirt—these were inconspicuous now, swallowed in the terrific effect of demoniac fury which confronted him. The eyes blasted him. He actually stepped back, flinching before their assault.

Then Toto began to speak, quietly, drawlingly, with an edge on her voice like a rasp.

"'Here is some one coming!'" she mimicked his words hatefully. "Ah, it is a shame for you that I come, too—not? But then all is not lost—she 'ave not see you kiss me!"

"Toto!" he cried in desperation.

She ground a spirit of laughter through her closed teeth.

"Me you call Toto—poor Toto, eh? What you call her? Darling? Sweet'eart, eh? To me, 'Sit back, damn you!' To her you take the 'and with your hat off, and smile sweetly!"

She added an epithet—an army epithet, one of those war-bred *immondices* which are less "saber cuts of Saxon speech" than dung fork stabs of sickened souls.

Ross was getting hold of himself, but Mrs. Hague threw the fatal match into the

powder. With a pretty curl of her pretty lip, she spoke.

"I'm afraid I'm in the way here," she drawled. "Delighted to have met your friend, Mr. Ross. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Good afternoon!"

And she prepared to pass on with a little ruffle of womanly dignity. Ross groaned. Toto took three long sliding steps and stood in her path.

"You—"

The second word was French. Mrs. Hague had never heard it before, but the tone translated it ruthlessly. She wanted to smile crushingly, to fight her way out of this silly scene with a barbed contempt and a cruel composure. She made a little grimace, not at Toto, but at Ross.

"Ah!"

Toto cleared for action. With a snap of the body, like the flick of her own elastics, she flashed into the approved and traditional posture of woman at war—left arm extravagantly akimbo, left leg trailing, right arm bent, with the fingers joined for the loud snap of defiance at the height of her adversary's face, chin up, eyes lambent under drooping lids—a drama condensed into an attitude.

Crack went the fingers under Mrs. Hague's nose, and not more than an inch away from it.

"You think you beat it now?" cried Toto. "Three is a crowd—yes? But I think first you 'ave little *tête-à-tête* with me. That man is my 'usban'! He belong to me—you see?"

Mrs. Hague did not reply. She knew she ought to be amused, but she wasn't—she was frightened.

"You don't see?" the cruel voice from the blood-colored lips went on. "No? Then I show you!"

Her hand moved with the swiftness of a striking snake, and pretty Mrs. Hague reeled back from a stinging open-handed slap in the face. Toto pressed upon her, smiting left and right. Mrs. Hague cried out faintly; and the sound released Ross from a paralysis of the nerves.

"Toto! You are mad!" he cried, as he grappled her and tried to hold her arms.

A clawing hand escaped him, reached past him, and came away with Mrs. Hague's woolen cap.

"For God's sake, go away, Mrs. Hague!" he panted, as he strove with a strength nearly equal to his own.

Toto said nothing, and presently she ceased to struggle and was still in his grip. Mrs. Hague had fled roadward and cabward. Ross released his wife and stood off.

"What's the matter with you?" he began. "I—I hope you're crazy, because if you aren't—" he broke off. "Do you know what you've done?"

She was pale now. The brain-clogging impulsion of her passion had been wiped from her face, and it was very steady and darkling.

"Selween!" she said. "That little woman is no use for you. Come kiss me!"

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. They were crying one to the other across an impassable gulf of race, temperament, and class. "What's the use?" he said.

"No?" asked Toto. "Better you have one kiss! No? Then—"

He did not see whence she drew the thing that was in the hand which she flung up. He saw the gleam of it as the hand fell, taking him a little to the left of the breastbone, and the agonizing rip of it through flesh and sinew as a rib turned the point, and the blade tore its way toward his flank.

The branches over them, patterned against the sky, seemed to shoot forward. He felt a heavy blow on the back of his head as he fell. Through a mist of sickness and pain he saw Toto standing and looking down at him.

He was found a couple of hours later and taken to a hospital. He told a tale of a murderous assault by a chance-encountered ruffian. Toto was not mentioned. Mrs. Hague was willing enough to hold her peace. There might never have been a Toto to flutter decorous dovescots with her falcon's flights and swoops.

V

Two evenings later, while Mrs. Hague sat beside a hospital bed and took counsel with Selwyn Ross regarding a conspiracy of silence, the falcon reached her aerie.

It was Mother Fréjus who saw her first—Mother Fréjus, sixty years of age, with her golden hair, her rouge, her scent, her load of stage jewels, her vulture's eyes, and her vampire's soul, sitting at the receipt of custom in her café by the harbor of Marseilles. The Chinamen, the lascars, and the mixed whites thronged her tables, drinking, gambling, and smoking. The reek of them burdened the air. Their bab-

ble rose and sank like a chorus in hell; and over their heads, in her *caissière's* pulpit, Mother Fréjus sat and brooded upon who knows what memories.

A figure appeared in the doorway that led in from the street, and stood gazing. Mother Fréjus turned idle eyes upon it. A second later she uttered a shout and climbed unhandily down from her place. Her customers turned to stare at her ballooning along between the chairs to receive the newcomer.

"My little one!" cried Mother Fréjus. "It is truly you? How I am content to

see you! We heard all sorts of things, even that you were married!"

Toto gave a shrug.

"That was an accident," she said. "I am a widow now. One arranges these things."

Mother Fréjus twinkled at her wickedly.

"True!" she agreed. "And now you will stay here with me, is it not? You will be very welcome."

Toto nodded.

"I will stay," she answered. "Ah!" she exclaimed, as Mother Fréjus drew her in. "It is good to be home again!"

The Minx

LANCE GIFFORD, AMATEUR SOCIOLOGIST, INVESTIGATES A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER

By Reed Warren

ULSTER collar upturned and tweed hat brim down, Lance Gifford lunged through the doorway of the Bachelors' Building, out of the snow-riven darkness. Intent upon reaching his particular haven on the third floor, he went swiftly up the curving mahogany staircase, rounded the turn at a bound, and—stopped short.

Not two feet from him was a girl—here in this Eveless Eden. Her back was toward him, and she was bending forward, fumbling with a key in the lock of Suite 24.

A hasty impression of a smart sport coat and a swirl of fawn feather about her hat—then Lance forgot it all in the sight of her face, turned toward him in startled awareness of his presence. It was a young, vivid, piquant face, the lips a trifle tremulous with surprise, the firmly rounded chin held high.

Then the girl's expression changed, oddly, to relief. The corners of her mouth were obviously restrained from lifting, and, with subdued laughter in her amber eyes, she opened the door and went in.

Lance found himself in his own room, with no remembrance of how he had ar-

rived there. His mind was in a state of bewilderment and shock. Even the usual dweller in this staid old mansion might have suffered momentary mental upheaval after such an encounter, the incident itself being so unprecedented, and the girl intruder so out of type; and Lance Gifford was not usual, or custom-made. Neither did he properly belong in the Bachelors' Building at all, for he was merely sharing the quarters of a friend while his own family were in the South.

Lance's hereditary place was in one of the few Knickerbocker families who had resisted the swift-moving social tide, and had remained intrenched in their old red brick house, guarded by stone lions, fronting on Washington Square, now the haunt of immigrants. Proximity to Greenwich Village and the tribes of southern and eastern Europe had not effected any change of thought in the elder Giffords. They had remained conservative, selective, and slightly pompous through it all.

Lance, in his incalculable deviations from the established order, in his unaccountable leanings toward color, experimentation, life in the mass, in his almost

vulgar insistence on a definition of what it was all about, was somewhat of a trial to his parents. The masculine Gifford, from time immemorial, had been in the law or finance, faithfully attending a down-town office two or three hours a day and signing checks, as a gentleman should. Lance, after college, had chosen to "postgrad" in journalism and sociology, taking courses which seemed to include reaching out tentatively, here, there, and everywhere.

The modern spirit? Scarcely that, with Lance. He harked back to *Sir Galahad* and the Crusaders.

Yet such is the power of environment that when his parents reluctantly departed, without him, for Palm Beach—incidentally quashing a secret plan of his mother's to corral his socialistic waverings within the pen of a "suitable marriage" brought about at that famous mating resort—it never once occurred to Lance to choose a less conventional temporary abode. He merely called a cab and had himself and his bags conveyed to the dignified seclusion of the Bachelors' Building, and to the companionship of Ross Hanison.

Ross Hanison was an entirely usual example of a coupon-cutting son of Mammon. He regarded the world as a vast playground, on which he had first choice in all the games.

To Lance, on the other hand, the universe appeared in the form of a mighty question mark. He *wanted to know*. Hitherto his explorations had left one channel unopened. Although surprisingly broad-minded in theory, he had shunned feminine contacts; but he could not get this girl's face, and where he had seen it, out of his mind. With an open book, unread, on his knees, he stared into the log fire and waited for Hanison's return.

II

"HELLO there, old thing!" was Hanison's cheerful greeting a few hours later. "Thought you wanted to hit the clover early to-night. The charmin' Kathryn asked after you, and sent her worst."

Ordinarily Ross had only to mention this name to get a rise out of Lance. Kathryn Claridge was the one exception to young Gifford's avoidance of the genus woman. She was a widow, ten years or more his senior, and she *understood*; but to-night—

"Was she there?" asked Lance, so perfunctorily that Ross stared at him.

Ross Hanison was several years older, several inches shorter, and several shades darker, than Lance. The same tailor clothed them; but while Ross appeared supergroomed and sleek as silk, Lance wore his garments with negligence, escaping spots and bagginess through no forethought of his own. The smoothness of his blond pompadour was frequently disarranged by an absent-minded gesture of his long hand, when concentrating on the human problems forever presenting themselves to his avid mind. Lean and hungry-looking as a young greyhound, the sensitive contour of his generous mouth, the stubborn quality of his jaw, and the mystic light in his deep-set blue eyes indicated a distinct and contradictory personality.

Noting Hanison's puzzled stare, Lance closed his book and yawned elaborately.

"Don't know why I'm up—half asleep when I came in," he remarked, adding, almost too casually: "Who's the chap in twenty-four? Wasn't sure whether I knew him or not."

"Is Carleton back?" Ross assumed, as Lance intended he should, that his friend had met the inmate of Suite 24, upon entering. "Thought he was out of town."

"Oh, is it Bruce Carleton—the old bach who hangs out at the Asp Club?"

"Old?" grinned Ross. "Guess you haven't been there lately. It's the talk of the town, the way Carleton's blossomed out—the jaunty walk of him—the snappy tailoring—boutonnière and clipped mustache. Some bird, I'll testify! Wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him land Mabel Cheney."

If only it *had* been Mabel, of the Follies, thought Lance! That sophisticated favorite of the hour was well able to take care of herself; but *this* little girl—why, the thing was appalling, no matter what way you looked at it. An old man—Carleton must be fifty odd—rejuvenated through the sacrifice of precious youth! For her youth *was* precious. No human face could lie as hers must have lied if she was the other kind.

In his solitary prowlings, at all hours and in all neighborhoods, Lance had recognized, and pitied, that other kind. Once only an inherent delicacy of nostril had prevented the experience from assuming a personal character. He had perceived, also, that lack of innate chastity is not confined to any one class or order of woman—

hood. He had noticed the same look about a mouth beside him at the opera; but this girl did *not* have it.

Lance silently anathematized the social code that restrained him from breaking into Suite 24 and rescuing the imperiled damsel. But supposing she didn't want to be rescued? Beyond that first startled look, she had certainly shown no sign of fear or hesitancy. Oh, there must be some different explanation of it—there *must* be!

Feeling Ross's quizzical gaze upon him, Lance rose abruptly.

"Night, old man—I'm turning in," he muttered, and went to his bedroom.

Turning *over* would have more accurately expressed the nature of his sleepless retirement, and with every turn his conjectures grew more disturbing. Yes, he must do something about it—no, he must mind his own business. The pendulum of his emotions swung violently back and forth.

What a lovely shade of reddish brown her cheeks were! Her eyes were brown, too, with thickly fringing lashes as deeply, softly black as soot. What had *that* to do with it? Nothing—less than nothing. The sensitive lips of the boy—he was only twenty-two—curled in self-scorn. It was a case for some society—she was probably a minor.

Nevertheless, Lance Gifford did not report the case of the girl in Suite 24.

III

THE following day was Sunday, and rainy. Lance and the weather moped.

Returning after dark, somewhat damp and mud-streaked, from an aimless excursion countryward, Lance dined on impulse, just as he was, at the Asp Club—that haunt of whist lovers and window loungers. Viewing life with a misanthropic eye, he expected bad news, if any, but was momentarily cheered upon hearing from the chatty head waiter, Jules, that Carleton was out of town. His feminine guest, then, exulted Lance, had been minus her host.

With the salad came the depressing realization that it was not within the bounds of common sense to presume that the girl had entered the Bachelors' Building for any good purpose. Very possibly she knew Carleton, and, aware of his intended absence, had appropriated his key and rifled the place at her leisure.

Goaded by this new suspicion, Lance left his dessert untouched and made an impetu-

ous exit—so impetuous, in fact, that at the door he ran into an incoming member. Striking squarely the member's receptively bulging waistcoat, the jolt served to clear Lance's muddled senses. An idea pierced its way through.

"That's the stuff, I tell you!" he cried enthusiastically.

The buffeted one, who had rightfully expected to hear, "Beg your pardon," recovered his breath with a snort of indignation, glared balefully at Lance, and passed on.

Unconscious alike of snort and glare, young Gifford pursued his new idea as a hound its quarry. It led him to the smart red and white brick home of Kathryn Claridge, in the upper East Sixties. He could tell Mrs. Claridge. She wouldn't blunder. She would understand, and would know what to do.

Mention has been made of the fact that this was the Sabbath day. More specifically, it was the first Sunday in the month—a significant distinction in the Claridge *ménage*, and one with which Lance was familiar, but which he had characteristically forgotten, until ushered by the butler into a crowded drawing-room. Suddenly conscious of his mud-splashed gray tweeds among the correct black coats, Lance colored hotly and began a hasty retreat; but Mrs. Claridge's alert eyes had spied him, and her large, cool hands fairly pulled him within the circle.

Kathryn Claridge was a decidedly plain woman, yet somehow superb. So alive with humor and kindness were her large, mismated features, so colorful her carrot-red masses of hair, so magnetic her twinkling green eyes, and so clever her costuming, that she achieved an attractiveness greater than beauty. She possessed one handsome physical attribute—a perfectly modeled neck and shoulders, which now rose grandly from the sea foam of her gown, forming an exquisite white background for a necklace of emeralds that a maharaja might have envied.

The tall, shy boy with the mystic eyes seldom appeared at these first Sundays. He was frankly bored by such general gatherings. Surmising that it was an absent-minded error on his part, Mrs. Claridge took a mischievous delight in forcing him to abide by it.

"So glad, Lance! Meet Mrs. Broadbent, and Professor Strebinoff. Lance Gif-

ford, Mrs. Broadbent — yes, Martin Gifford's son."

Lance bowed before a white-haired, bright-eyed matron in mauve satin, and shook the limp hand of the Russian pianist.

"I went to school with your father"—Mrs. Broadbent clipped her words with a kind of pleasant sharpness—"but I've kept on going, and he hasn't. Are you an old fogey, too, or one of the new generation? It hasn't anything to do with age, you know."

"I've never tried to class myself"—Lance endeavored conscientiously to leave his secret thoughts and follow her—"but I agree with you on the age question."

He smiled his shy, fugitive smile, and the kindly old lady thought him delightful; but as some one claimed her attention momentarily, and Strebinoff was surrounded by a bevy of feminine admirers, Lance seized the moment to drift on. Seeing the crowd only as a confused medley of bright gowns, naked shoulders, and black coats, he followed the line of least resistance toward the rear drawing-room. There one could breathe—but the respite was short. Ross Hanison traitorously grasped his arm and cried exultantly to his companion, Adrienne Blake:

"Well, look who's here, Adrienne!" Then *sotto voce*: "Daniel in the lion's den! Lance hates these coffee crushes like poison."

"Why, Lance Gifford!" gushed Adrienne, rolling her pale eyes soulfully and wriggling her thin, sinuously draped form as she talked. "I haven't seen you in a perfect age! Did you hear that last number? De-lightful! Strebinoff plays with such tone—such wonderful nuances of feeling! Oh, Mr. Hanison"—she turned toward Ross—"the maid isn't coming our way. Won't you—"

Lance writhed inwardly. He knew Adrienne Blake's tactics by heart. She was already out when he went away to college, and she delighted in a *tête-à-tête*, no matter how unpromising the material. His long eyes followed the released victim, blithesomely picking his way toward a diminutive maidservant with a silver trayful of fruit punch.

As Hanison reached her, she turned, and—Lance swallowed hard and blinked incredulously—yes, it was *she*, in short-skirted black silk and the Frenchiest of tiny aprons and caps! There was an excited

flush in her red-brown cheeks, and in her brown eyes was the look of subdued laughter that he already knew!

IV

LANCE's heart pounded so violently that it drowned the sound of Adrienne's elaborate phrases. As she was a social monologist, however, his emotional deafness remained undiscovered, and with Ross's return he managed to elude her.

Deftly avoiding the necessity of being served by the little maid, Lance drifted about, watching her covertly, as many men did openly. With an interest not merely in her piquant face, he discovered that she in turn watched Mrs. Claridge, and that, as she watched, her mouth drooped and her eyes grew wistful.

The poisonous doubts that this girl's actions evoked returned tenfold to harass him. She was no maidservant—of that he was as certain as of her unfitness for the rôle she had apparently played the night before. But what was she doing *here*, and why had she been *there* last night? What was her game? This time Lance intended to find out.

He caught her hovering in the hallway, near enough to overhear the widow's sparkling talk with old Major Sterling, who frankly adored her. Later, Lance saw the girl leaning over the banister, her lips parted in a tender smile, and a liquid gleam in her eyes, which were fixed upon his hostess. It seemed to him that she looked at the emeralds, and that these—or something else—enchanted her.

Could she be a thief—a member, perhaps, of the gang of some *Fagin*, who used her captivating personality for his own evil ends?

Trailing this eminently reasonable solution of the mystery came another problem. Was it not his plain duty to warn his hostess?

Lance dallied with the idea miserably, but failed to speak. At parting, Mrs. Claridge threw him one of her brilliant smiles and an encouraging glance; but he only swallowed hard, and carried all his black thoughts home with him to another night of mental torture.

The morning after the Claridge musicale found Lance irresistibly impelled in the direction of the widow's home, although what he expected to gain by going he did not know.

As his laggard steps dragged past the smart red and white brick house, Mrs. Claridge's electric brougham glided smoothly down the street and came to a halt. Idly flicking his stick and watching from the tail of his eye, a few rods farther on, Lance saw Kathryn Claridge come hurriedly out, chic as ever in her furs and winged straw toque, but evidently nervous, and wearing an unaccustomed frown.

Gesticulating excitedly, she spoke to the chauffeur.

Lance's nostrils widened and his jaw set as he surmised the possible cause of her unusual lack of poise. He walked quickly toward her. She turned to him gratefully, as to a friend whom she could trust.

"Oh, Lance! My emeralds are gone!"

If Mrs. Claridge had been in condition to take note of it, the deep concern in Lance Gifford's open countenance would certainly have flattered her; but she continued, unheeding and almost hysterical:

"It seems awful to believe it—that pretty young thing! I only engaged her yesterday, and she's gone without a word. Her bed had not even been slept in. I suppose I'll have to communicate with the police, and—"

"Don't do that!" Lance interposed tensely. "I mean," he hurried on, as her eyes widened with surprise, "not just yet. I know you wouldn't like the publicity, and perhaps I can help you. Men know more about such things, and—"

"That's awfully good of you, Lance. You're a dear!" The widow's voice broke. "I'm so upset! You see, it isn't their money value alone, but—no one knows it yet, Lance—but I'm going to be married, and they were *his gift!*"

There were tears in her eyes.

"I'll get them back. You just leave it to me." Lance spoke with a confidence which he was far from feeling. "I've a hunch. Let me follow it for a day, and then I'll phone you the result."

Lance's "hunch" was merely the wild idea that the girl who had robbed his charming friend of her engagement jewels, and himself of sleep and perhaps of something still more vital, might be found in Suite 24.

Possibly she knew of Carleton's absence, and thought the place a good hide-out. Who would dream of looking for her there? Well, *he* would, and perhaps he might get hold of her before her confederates had

disposed of the booty. To save the gems and the girl thief too—this was the difficult feat he was determined to accomplish.

V

LANCE cut through to Fifth Avenue and started to walk down home, mulling things over as he went. His mental processes were always more alert when walking.

As he was passing the most noted jewel shop on the avenue, he absently glanced in through the opening door. Suddenly his heart skipped a beat, and then began an Irish jig.

At first, when he saw that fawn feather, he judged it a mirage—the result of intense longing for the actuality. Not until he glimpsed the curve of the red-brown cheek, the smart cut of the loose sport coat, the pretty hand toying with a glittering lavallière on the counter, did the truth sink in that he had actually found her. He halted abruptly, hovering near the door like one awaiting a companion soon to come forth.

What was she doing out in broad daylight after her crime? Would she dare try to sell the emeralds here? Why, they had probably been purchased in that very shop, and she would be caught as soon as she displayed them! He could picture those delicately firm wrists bruised by handcuffs, that laughing, elfin face a wan mask of humiliation and fear!

It occurred to Lance that she would not be likely to recognize him. Caution in trailing her, therefore, was needless. He was about to enter the store when she shook her head smilingly at the clerk and carelessly stuffed the lavallière into her *suède* bag. Then she came out in her light, buoyant way, and started swiftly up the avenue.

Lance took up the chase at a discreet distance, and became her unannounced companion on a tour of shopping. Next came luncheon at a tea room, where she ordered dainties indiscriminately, like a schoolgirl on a spree. Then he followed her to a *matinée*, where he smiled when she did and swallowed a lump of sympathy when she wept, as only the innocent-hearted can weep, over stage sorrows.

By this time he had concluded that she was a well born kleptomaniac, and was spending the proceeds of the emeralds in natural girl fashion. If he could only induce her to tell where she had disposed of

them, he might get the jewels back; but the girl herself was lost indeed. His heart grew leaden with the realization that although he might have reformed a normal girl who had fallen into evil company, kleptomania is a congenital weakness, and probably incurable.

But the Gifford jaw is not stubborn for nothing. Lance would *try*.

Outside, in the crowd and gathering darkness, he almost lost her. Then, glimpsing the fawn feather as she leaned out of a taxi to give an address, he beckoned the chauffeur of another cab, and offered generous inducement to keep hers in sight.

Across Thirty-Ninth Street and down Fifth Avenue his conveyance alternately whizzed and crawled, and it scarcely surprised him to be carried to his own door. His guess had been the right one, after all—the minx was hiding there! She had the instinct to hide, when not overpowered by the desire to spend her ill gotten gains.

VI

LANCE caught up with her just as she was entering Suite 24, and pushed his way in behind her. He heard her gasp of fright before her groping fingers found the electric button. Then, though her cheeks were pale, she faced him bravely enough, there in the small foyer of the apartment, as he closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"I've seen you—you've been following me," she accused furiously.

"Don't be frightened."

Lance spoke gently, and his blue eyes were full of pity. That little gasp of fear had dispelled the modicum of cool judgment that remained to him. Thief, kleptomaniac, moral delinquent though she was, he wanted to shield her from the just punishment of a merciless world.

"I really want to help you," he continued.

The genuineness of his sympathy penetrated her consciousness. He saw her body relax and the terror die from her eyes; but the look of fear returned again at his next words.

"Just tell me where you sold the emeralds," he urged, "and I'll buy them back myself. No one will accuse you—no one will hurt you. I give you my word of honor!"

She bit her lip and glanced desperately about.

"I—don't know—about any—emeralds," she replied unsteadily. "You—you must be looking for some one else. Won't you please go?"

Much as he disliked the rôle, Lance saw that he must be stern with her. The poor child would ruin everything by her denials. In his concern for her plight, his natural diffidence with her sex was dissipated.

"Look here!" he said bluntly. "There's no use in denying it to *me*. I know you stayed here the night before last, and then got Mrs. Claridge to engage you as a maid. My name is Lance Gifford. I live in this building, and Mrs. Claridge is a friend of mine. I was at the musicale, and saw you spying on her and watching the necklace."

The brown eyes gave him a blazing flash that made him flinch, but he went on relentlessly.

"This morning she told me that it had been stolen, and that you had left without notice. She was going to send for the police, but I stopped her—for the time being. I can't save you from jail unless you tell me where the emeralds are. Just the money equivalent won't do—they have a sentimental significance."

"Oh, are they *really* stolen?" was her bewildering reply. For the first time she seemed actually touched. "I do hope she recovers them before—"

She stopped short, and her hand went to her mouth, as if to silence herself.

"That's up to you." Lance thought her insincere, and spoke gruffly. "Tell me where I can buy them in, and I'll help you to escape; but you must leave town tonight. It isn't safe for you to stay here."

"Honestly, I didn't take the necklace."

Her eyes met his unwaveringly. He could almost have believed her.

"Then will you kindly explain why you broke into Mr. Carleton's apartment, and then masqueraded as a maid?"

He forced the sarcastic note. It wouldn't do to appear easy.

"I—I can't!" Sooty lashes swept her cheeks, and she hung her head like a naughty child caught at the jam pot.

"Look here!" Lance again turned big-brotherly. "You get your things together while I run up for mine, and I'll take you out to my aunt's in Orange till this thing blows over. You've got to let me look out for you, whether you took that necklace or not. How long will it take you to get ready?"

She looked at him in a puzzled way, frowning as if she was thinking hard. Then the corners of her mouth went up and the laughing light danced in her eyes.

"About fifteen minutes," she returned demurely.

"No longer!" Lance warned her sternly. "Remember, this way is better than going to jail."

Then he took the stairs to Hanison's suite three at a time.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling went the telephone bell. With an impatient exclamation at the untimely interruption, Lance lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Gifford—Lance?" queried Kathryn Claridge's voice. "I've tried all afternoon—everywhere—to get in touch with you. I—"

"Nothing doing yet," Lance broke in hurriedly; "but I'll have news for you in the morning. I'm hot on the trail, so pardon me if—"

"But, Lance, I've found them," interrupted Mrs. Claridge in her turn. "They weren't stolen at all. I had taken the box from the—"

"Thank God!" came the fervent exclamation from Gifford's end of the wire.

Kathryn Claridge was both astonished and offended to find herself talking to central, who told her with acid sweetness:

"The party has rung off."

In his haste to relate the joyful news and to fall on his knees before the girl downstairs, Lance had clean forgotten the requirements of courtesy. In two jumps he was back at Suite 24.

A locked door stared him in the face!

VII

LANCE knocked—he rang—he called—all in vain. He shook and banged and rattled. No sound came from within. The silence was fairly ominous.

Once more a prey to wild surmises, Lance feared that the girl had felt that she was trapped, and might harm herself. He disliked letting any one know that she was there, but the thought that he might be in time to save her from some act of self-destruction made him bolt downstairs to the basement and rout out the superintendent, one O'Haggerty. This functionary received his confused explanation with a cold and calculating stare, and accompanied him to Suite 24 with a pass key and an air which plainly said:

"Now, my young sprig, where do *you* come in on this?"

It didn't help matters with O'Haggerty when a thorough search of the apartment revealed no sign of feminine presence, past or otherwise; but Lance didn't give a continental for O'Haggerty's opinions or deductions. He was utterly absorbed in his anxiety over the flown bird. Where had she gone—and to what fate?

It seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed a red-brown maid; for trail there was none.

Lance watched in vain for Bruce Carleton's return. Finally, one day, he chanced to see his furniture on the sidewalk, being loaded into a van. Naturally a scrupulous respecter of individual privacy, Lance formed, with some difficulty, a query as to its destination.

"Richmond, Virginia," said the burly truckman, as he spat expertly.

Again Lance moped, avoiding his friends, and nursing a determination to go to Richmond and have it out with a certain gray-haired wretch who ought to know better. Then, one morning, the mail brought him a wedding invitation which coupled painful memories and startled him out of his indifference toward the world about him. The bride-to-be was Kathryn Claridge, and the man Bruce Carleton!

Through the chaotic mental torment that this news induced in Lance, one thought rose to the surface, stabbing his wound afresh. What would this mean to the girl—the dear little minx?

Furiously he fought to stamp out a lurking tenderness. Why should he care what happened to her? As for Kathryn Claridge, if a woman of her experience and charm could want an old rip like Carleton, it only strengthened certain recent theories that Lance had formed of the sex. He had done with women forever, he decided. He was through.

He spent the next week planning trips to remote spots where mad adventure and certain danger were to be found; but high noon of the stated day—February 25—found him in the drawing-room of the widow's home, among a dozen or so of her intimates, listening to the immortal march from "*Lohengrin*" interpreted by a stringed orchestra hidden behind palms.

The perfume of lilacs from a profusion of luxuriant white clusters filled the atmosphere, and seemed to waft itself out, like

the triumphant peal of the bridal march, to greet the oncoming procession.

It is to be supposed that the bride, the groom, the clergyman, and all the usual participants in a fashionable wedding, were there; but Lance Gifford saw only the maid of honor—a brown-eyed girl in butterfly yellow chiffon and wide lace hat, her bare, rounded arms full of blush roses.

VIII

ALL through the ceremony, which to Lance was only a murmur like the faint roar of the sea upon a distant shore, his eyes never swerved from the lovely little maid of honor. As the wedding party broke up and began mingling informally with the guests, he managed to corner her and shunt her off from the main line now streaming toward the dining room.

"Who are you?"

The question, though necessarily low-toned, was almost fiercely put.

"Zoe Carleton, Mrs. Bruce Carleton's brand-new stepdaughter," she told him, with disarming meekness.

"Why, Bruce Carleton is a bachelor—or was!" he flung back at her, still bitter with suffering.

As she looked up at his pale, somber young face, an almost maternal softness replaced the teasing laughter in her eyes. A pretty hand was laid lightly upon his arm, the roses falling unheeded to the floor.

"Why, you see, I—"

She broke off, coloring and stammering delightfully.

"Well?" prompted Lance, groping for her other hand, his eyes suddenly radiant with a new hope.

"Why, it's just that papa was terribly in love with Kathryn—she has asked me to call her that—and he was afraid she might not want to marry a man with a grown daughter. He told her, of course, before any announcement was made, but he wanted to make her care for him first. He came out to school to see me, and—oh, that was so funny!" She gave a delicious little gurgle of laughter. "I mean when you said you'd take me to your aunt's. My school is in Orange, and I've met your aunt at our receptions."

Lance's answering smile was grim. He couldn't see the humor of it—yet.

"Your father came to the school," he prompted her.

"Oh, yes," she resumed obediently. "Papa came and told me all about it, and asked if I would mind keeping myself a secret for a little while. I didn't mind that, but I thought I ought to have something to say about a new mother, so when papa went to Virginia, to buy the plantation, I—I stole his latchkey and invented an excuse to leave school. Then I came to New York to—to look her over. You know the rest," she ended, with a glance of triumphant mischief.

Lance drew nearer, regardless of trampled roses, and leaned far down until his face was close to hers. He smiled his shy, fugitive smile, but the light in his blue eyes was that of a conqueror.

"You've a lot to make up to me," he bullied softly, "for those hideous weeks that I might have been spared!"

"In that case," replied Zoe demurely, "I suppose I'd better begin."

And she did.

PLUCKING HASTY BLOSSOMS

In the long endurance
Of his many days,
Love's feet learn to wander
Down unnumbered ways—

Pleasant ways and bitter;
Roads that lead to hate,
Or paths that wind forever
To faith inviolate.

But in the endeavor
Of love's long pursuit,
Plucking hasty blossoms
Never gathers fruit!

Harry Kemp

The Mark Sinister

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF MARY BLAKE, QUEEN
OF THE STAGE, AND HER SISTER ANNE

By Lee Thayer

Author of "The Stonehill Mystery," "The Unlatched Door," etc.

DONALD VAN LOO MORRIS, born to wealth and high social station in New York, is in love with Mary Blake, a young actress of beauty and talent. He importunes her to marry him, but she hints at a tragedy in her life, and will not say yes. At the street door of her apartment he takes her in his arms, and she returns his caress. Then she repulses him and flees to her sister Anne, with whom she lives.

Next day Donald is unable to get Mary on the telephone, and on the following morning he receives a letter telling him that she has gone away until such time as she can clear up her "ugly, pitiful secret," as she calls it. Donald hurries to her apartment, which he finds locked and deserted. Protruding under the door is the end of a silk scarf that Mary had worn. It is stained with blood.

Greatly alarmed, Donald enlists the aid of Peter Clancy, head of a private detective agency, and they begin a determined search for the vanished sisters. It appears that Ann Blake is badly disfigured by a birthmark on her face, and they find a taxi driver who took a woman answering her description to the Pennsylvania Station; but there the trail ends. Mary Blake's manager, Frederick Jones, when informed of her disappearance, can suggest no explanation. A possible clew is found when Clancy discovers, in the Blake apartment, what is evidently a photograph of Mary as a child, bearing the photographer's name—Walter Lord, Hobart Falls, New York. The detective decides to go to Hobart Falls and make inquiries there.

XVI

A CLEAR, bright morning followed the heavy thunder shower which had come late in the night. As Peter Clancy boarded the train for Hobart Falls, he hoped that it was an omen.

He had just had time for a few minutes' talk with O'Malley, in which he gave his partner instructions about reaching him, if anything of importance should transpire during the day.

"Better wire me at Hobart Falls," he said. "Have it left in the telegraph office, to be called for. I can't tell where I'll be stopping, and I can't think of any other way I'd be sure of getting it. I don't believe there'll be anything."

After that he had hastily called Donald Morris on the telephone, and had explained briefly that he was rushing out of town on a new scent.

"Another false clew?" asked Morris wearily.

In his mind's eye Peter saw the pale, tired face of his client.

"Perhaps," he replied, in a friendly, hopeful tone. "You never can tell. We mustn't miss a trick, and I've found something that I'm bound to follow up. It may lead to nothing, of course, but there's always a chance. I'm in a deuce of a rush just now, and I'll have to postpone telling you about it till I get back. Don't be discouraged. While there's life, there's hope. While there's life!" he repeated to himself, as he hung up the receiver. "I wish to God I could be sure that Mary Blake is still alive! Well, anyway—"

He made the nine thirty train for Hobart Falls with four minutes to spare.

"Which is enough for anybody," thought Peter, as he watched the ugly houses and factories slip by.

The railroad ran northward on the west side of the Hudson, for Peter had learned that Hobart Falls was situated in the Catskill Mountains. After a time, the train slipped from behind a range of hills into a tunnel and out again, and Peter, startled from his deep absorption, saw below him a wide reach of the great river, shining blue

and silver in the morning sun. No one who has ever seen that striking view could fail to be impressed by its beauty and grandeur. Peter, city-bred as he was, was strongly affected by the sight of the wooded hills, lapping and overlapping, and the broad, serene river, winding in between.

His thoughts ran:

"I wonder if I'll be lucky enough to find Walter Lord, and what he'll know! Gee, those rocks are corking, and those big, soft pines! It was a long while ago—maybe twenty years—that they wore that kind of clothes. That's a house, away up on that hill. Must have a ripping view. He may be dead by now. He mustn't dare to be—I need him too much!"

And so his mind ran on, alternating between hope and discouragement, through the hours that followed.

He had to change cars twice, each time to a road of narrower gage.

"The next will be roller skates, I should think," he said to himself as he jerked and bumped along in the little mountain train.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they ran into the tiny, ugly, red-painted station of Hobart Falls. They had passed through a number of stations, vociferous with red-faced hackmen and seething with stout, overdressed women awaiting summer visitors of the cheaper sort. This little place was quite different. There were no big hotels or boarding houses in the immediate vicinity, and so few people that only two trains a day stopped at Hobart Falls. The loungers about the station were obviously country-bred and American.

Peter quickly approached one of them, and asked where the telegraph office could be found. He wished to ascertain at once if there was any message from O'Malley.

The man jerked his thumb in the direction of the waiting room.

"In there," he said briefly.

"Nothing ain't come for nobody to-day, no way," said the agent, in reply to Peter's inquiry.

The redundancy of negatives satisfying Peter that nothing of importance had occurred since he left his office, he stepped swiftly out again upon the platform, and looked about him. Blue hills and valleys surrounded the little station on every side. In the middle distance could be seen one or two small farmhouses. In the immediate foreground, drawn up close to the platform, was a decrepit, dingy Ford. A long, lank

man, sitting at the wheel, glanced up at Peter expectantly.

"Is this for hire?" asked Peter, indicating the ancient car with a motion of his head. "And can you take me over to the village?"

The driver grinned at a man who was leaning against the edge of the doorway, and spat generously over the wheel.

"Git in," he said.

Peter threaded himself into the back seat, and the weary flivver, with a heavy groan, started down the empty road.

"Any p'tickeler place?" asked the man at the wheel, turning his weather-beaten face and looking Peter over from head to foot.

"I think I'll want to spend the night here," answered Peter, a trifle dubiously. "Is there a hotel?"

The man laughed.

"This ain't no metropolis," he vouchsafed, "but I guess the widder Lord 'll put you up for the night, if you'd like to go there."

The widow Lord! Peter's heart sank, but he only said:

"That 'll do all right, I guess. Take me there, will you?"

At that moment they turned a sharp corner, and Peter saw why the driver had grinned at the lounge on the station platform. The village—what there was of it—was not four minutes' walk from the station, but out of sight, being hidden by the small, wooded shoulder of a hill.

It was a sleepy, quiet little place, shut in by rolling upland. There was one long street—or, rather, a wide place in the road—on each side of which were small wooden houses, mostly painted white, with green shutters. There were two stores, one of which was also the post office, and a blacksmith's shop. In front of the latter stood an old-fashioned buggy with empty shafts. From within came the ringing clink of metal upon metal. Save for an old dog, wandering down the street, and a few loose hens, dusting themselves in the road, there was no sign or sound of life.

"*Rip Van Winkle* might have taken his twenty years' nap right here in the middle of the street, instead of going to all the trouble of climbing up one of those mountains," thought Peter. "Wild-goose chase I've come on, anyway—I feel it in my bones. Walter Lord is probably as dead as the rest of the village."

The silence got on his nerves, and he spoke to the driver.

"Think the widow Lord will be awake when we get there?" he asked.

The man turned a sardonic, screwed-up eye upon him.

"S next house," he said, pointing. "We'll be there in one shake of a lamb's tail. What 'd she be asleep this time of day fer?"

Peter looked without much interest at the house indicated. It was old and gray and weather-beaten, but evidently had once been the considerable house of Hobart Falls. Low and rambling, it faced the street, standing a few feet back among some ragged flowering shrubs.

Suddenly Peter's eyes lit up, and his gaze became intent. He reached over and caught the driver's shoulder.

"Stop here!" he said sharply. "This is the place I want to stop!"

"Sure it's the place ye want to stop," repeated the driver disgustedly. "Ain't I been tellin' ye? This is the widdler Lord's."

"Oh, yes—I forgot for the moment."

The light faded from Peter's eyes. "The widow Lord's," he muttered inwardly. "The man's dead, of course. However—"

He glanced again at the object which had raised a sudden hope within him. At the far end of the house, standing out at right angles from it, and partly hidden by vines, was an old, battered sign:

WALTER LORD
Photographer

"I've got the right house, anyway, and without any lost motion," thought Peter. "And that's the luck of the Irish—as far as it goes!"

He paid the driver the "two bits" suggested as the amount of the fare—after the man had translated it into terms comprehensible to Peter. The sum demanded—an exorbitant one for the trifling distance—was paid so unconcernedly that the driver lingered while Peter stepped quickly up to the front door and rang the old, jangling bell. A man so free with money didn't come to Hobart Falls very often.

Peter had made up his mind that he would spend the night there, in any case, if "the widdler Lord" would take him in. He knew he would have to hire a car and ride down to Kortekill, two stations below, to catch the midnight train, which did not stop at Hobart Falls, if he were to go back

to town that night. The thought of bumping over the bad roads in a prehistoric flivver, after being up most of the previous night, made no appeal to him.

"I'll make her take me in," thought Peter, and rang the bell again.

"Anybody want me?"

The voice came from just over Peter's head, but he could see no one, for the roof of the little old Dutch porch hid the speaker.

"Who wants me, Josh?" the voice from above repeated.

"Nobuddy wants you, Walt," the driver, in the road, bawled out. "'S a stranger wants to spend the night. 'S yer sister-in-law to home?"

Peter's heart leaped more swiftly than his long legs, if not so far. One jump, and he was on the narrow brick walk, looking up at an open window, from which protruded what he thought was the quaintest old head he had ever seen.

The face was that of a man of seventy or more, but the hair and the long, sweeping mustache were darkly, brilliantly black. The hair was thin and carefully brushed forward above the ears, in a bygone style. Two little twinkling eyes looked down from either side of a long, thin, pointed nose—looked down at Peter in mild surprise.

"You wanted to stay here for the night, Mr.—er—"

"Clancy," Peter supplied eagerly. "Yes—I want to look around Hobart Falls a little. Could you—this is Mr. Walter Lord, isn't it?"

He glanced aside, as if for verification, to the half hidden sign.

"That's me," replied the craning head, with a smile. "That's me, all right."

Peter's heart settled down to a steady beat.

"Well, Mr. Lord," he said, "it's just like this—I've got a little business here in Hobart Falls, and I want to spend the night. Josh"—he spoke as if the driver, who still lingered, were an old and intimate friend—"Josh thought Mrs. Lord would take me in. I'm sorry she's away, but couldn't you manage to put me up? It would be a great favor."

"Aw, take him in, Walt," urged Josh, from the road. "Let me know if you'll need a hack again, mister. I got the best car in the Falls."

Peter was anxiously watching the face above him.

"Well, you see, Miranda not being here, and all—makes it kind of hard. She's awful particular about the linen closet, and I don't know what sheets—"

"Never mind the sheets," Peter interrupted quickly. "I'll sleep on the floor, if necessary. I've just got to stay to-night, Mr. Lord, and if you don't take me in—"

"Wait a second, and I'll come down," said Walter Lord, disappearing from the window with the abruptness of a jack-in-the-box.

"He'll take ye, all right," Josh called out encouragingly, as he turned his little car. "Lemme know when ye want me agin;" and he was gone, in a cloud of lazy dust.

"If you wouldn't mind coming around this way, Mr. Clancy—"

The entire figure of Walter Lord disclosed itself at the corner of the house—a figure that was in strict accord with his face. Slender, bent, and old it was, but almost jauntily clad. Light gray trousers, somewhat stained with chemicals, were carefully pressed into a knifelike crease down the front. A double-breasted waistcoat of starched white duck sported a long festoon of well worn gold watch chain.

Around the old man's neck was a standing collar with tall points, so large that it made his thin neck look, so Peter thought, like a lily in a pot. About the collar was tied a long, narrow black silk tie. He was just settling his thin shoulders into a black broadcloth coat, with wide lapels and square tails, which he had obviously donned for the occasion.

"Come this way, Mr. Clancy," he repeated. "The front door sticks in this warm, damp weather, for we scarcely ever use it. All our friends come in here."

With a gracious and hospitable gesture, he held open the side door for his guest to pass. Peter had just time to notice that there was a small outside stairway leading to the second floor, built on at this end of the house, and that upon the second floor there was a good-sized slanting window, and on the roof a skylight.

"The photographic studio," thought Peter, as he followed Lord into the house.

As he crossed the threshold, he unostentatiously dropped his small hand bag just inside the door.

"I'm afraid I can't make you very comfortable, Mr. Clancy," said the old man doubtfully, drawing forward a sagging rocker, with an elaborate "tidy" on the

back. "Won't you sit down? My sister has gone over to Letty Bowen's for the day, and to spend the night. She'll be home in the morning. Too bad, too bad! There's only a cold supper. D'you mind cold suppers? I rather like 'em myself, this hot weather. 'I'll be as happy as a clam at high tide,' I said to Miranda; but I didn't expect to have a visitor. Let me take your hat. Not that I'm not glad of company. I do like to see new people—new faces. Keeps you young, don't you think? Oh, I almost forgot—do have a cigar."

He slipped one thin, stained hand into his breast pocket and drew out a Pittsburgh stogy of the longest, thinnest, and stogiest type. Peter shuddered inwardly, and ventured to ask if he might smoke cigarettes instead.

"Perhaps you would have one yourself, sir," he added, noting a funny little twinkle in the old man's eye.

"Well, you know"—Walter Lord spoke with slight embarrassment, at the same time reaching out an eager hand—"I must say I do prefer 'em to cigars; but Miranda—well, she kind of feels that cigars are more suitable for a man of my age."

He lit one of Peter's cigarettes, inhaled a long, delicious puff, and smiled gently.

"Dear old duck," thought Peter, "with the heart of a kid, and scared to death of his sister-in-law! Bet she's a tartar. I'm glad she isn't here."

Peter leaned his head back against a large, yellow butterfly worked in wool on a black background, crossed his long legs, and smoked leisurely, with the air of a man at ease.

"There must be a lot of good fishing around here," he remarked, taking a long shot at a possible hobby of the man he had determined should be his host. "Crossed a lot of likely-looking streams as we came up through the mountains."

He saw, by the expression of Walter Lord's face, that he had made a bull's-eye. The little man leaned forward and spoke with enthusiasm.

"There's the best fishing in the Catskills just beyond that meadow over there!" He pointed out of the window. "You can't see the stream from here, on account of the tall grass, but it's fine, open fishing, and just full of trout. Of course they're not very large, but along at the beginning of the season I caught one that weighed two pounds. Yes, sir—he was a beauty, and

there are more of 'em, if you know the pools. I could show you—"

After that Peter had things pretty much his own way. The talk ran largely on flies and tackle.

"He was sure to be a fly fisherman, if he fished at all, the good old sport!" thought Peter, smiling at his host.

Peter told a story of some wonderful fishing he had once up in Nova Scotia. Lord capped it with an experience of his in the Adirondacks, when he was a boy—and so the minutes flew. There was no further question as to Peter's spending the night there. The lonely old man was too eager for society, and too trusting and unsophisticated, to raise any objection to the harboring of an unheralded guest, particularly when the guest was a fisherman, and a fly fisherman, at that.

If Walter Lord had any idea that Mr. Clancy had come to Hobart Falls with a purpose other than to investigate the fishing possibilities of that region, his curiosity on the subject was completely held in check by his innate courtesy.

In the first few minutes of their acquaintance, Peter's quick mind had invented several stories to account for his presence there. He thought of being a doctor, seeking a good site for a sanitarium.

"For patients troubled with insomnia this would be ideal," he grinned to himself.

Perhaps it would awaken more sympathy to have a young wife who was ill, and needed mountain air and seclusion; but before he had talked with the old man very long, Peter conceived a deep distaste for subterfuge.

"Damn it all, I won't lie to the good old scout unless he compels me," he said to himself, as he watched Walter Lord making his fussy little preparations for supper, and listened to his constant flow of pleasant chatter as he passed back and forth from the kitchen.

"Cold lamb and some of Miranda's currant jelly," the old man said, as he placed a blue platter and a sauce dish filled with a truncated cone of wabbling crimson upon a small table in the west window. "Fine rich color where the sun strikes it, isn't it?" He stepped back to note the effect. "Let me see, there's a salad, too—lettuce from our own garden, Mr. Clancy. Pretty late for lettuce, but I plant it right along through the summer, and it does real well. Oh, I almost forgot the pot cheese!"

He bustled out into the kitchen, and presently returned with a crisp salad and a yellow bowl brimming with creamy cheese.

"The coffee's almost ready, and it 'll be good, too," he chuckled. "Miranda thinks strong coffee three times a day is bad for my nerves; but I made this myself, and I'll bet you won't get a better cup of coffee at the St. Denis Hotel." Peter had disclosed the fact that his home was in New York. "I used to go there quite a bit when I was younger. It's a grand place—don't you think so, Mr. Clancy?"

His tone was so wistful, so full of pleasant pictures and recollections, that Peter hadn't the heart to tell him that the old St. Denis had vanished long ago. He said that it certainly was one of the best places in New York, and let it go at that.

In a few minutes they were seated on either side of the little table in the window, a simple but bountiful meal spread between them. The westering sun gleamed on the quaint old blue and white china, and on the jug of larkspur and madonna lilies, which Walter Lord had moved to one side of the table, so that he could look at Peter as they ate and talked.

Peter exerted himself to be entertaining, a feat which his varied experience and ready Irish wit made easy of accomplishment. He told stories which brought tears of laughter to Walter Lord's twinkling eyes, and made him rock backward and forward in his chair. In order to invite the old man's confidence, Peter told some of his early experiences. Truthful stories they were, in the main, only slightly embellished, and most effective in their skillful blending of humor and pathos—but in them was no hint of Peter's present profession.

By the time supper was finished, Peter had achieved a footing of such friendly intimacy that he was allowed to help clear away. All the while he had been studying the little old countryman, whose quaint appearance would have been ridiculous to one less sympathetic than Peter Clancy. To him, the dyed hair and the jauntily worn, old-fashioned clothes spoke aloud of a spirit of undying youthfulness and simplicity, of a heart kept young by the love of all things beautiful, of a mind so filled with imagination and artistic longings that it had selected photography as the most congenial profession available.

Peter thought of the sleepy little village and the emptiness of the wooded hills, and

could imagine how few were the sitters who came to Walter Lord's old photographic studio. He wondered, in that remote spot, what incentive kept the light gray trousers so carefully creased, the linen vest so stiffly starched, the old, worn broadcloth coat so immaculately brushed.

They had left things tidy in the kitchen, and now, at ease in their pleasant relationship of host and welcome guest, they sat beside the open west window, smoking cigarettes and talking. Peter, looking always for an opening for the introduction of the subject which was uppermost in his mind, carefully guided the old man into speaking further of himself and his pursuits—a matter presenting no difficulties whatever, for Walter Lord had many hobbies, and rode them with an enthusiasm which age could not abate.

The detective learned, among other things, that the Lords had once been well off, but that the family estate had dwindled before Walter and his elder brother, Tom, came into possession. After Tom died, leaving his elderly widow and the remainder of the property to Walter's care, it had suffered still more.

"I did the best I could," said the old man wistfully; "but there it was. I always felt that I could have made more money if I could have gone to New York, but Miranda, and the old house—they seemed sort of to anchor me—"

"And your photographic studio, Mr. Lord—I should think you'd have hated to leave that," said Peter, at last boldly approaching the subject deepest in his thoughts. "By the way, speaking of photography"—he smiled and leaned forward across the table confidentially—"you may be surprised, but I've seen some of your work. It's good, too!"

"What?" cried Walter Lord. "You don't say so, Mr. Clancy! Some of my work in New York! Now I wonder who it could have been. I've only taken pictures of people around here, and there aren't so many. It's never been what you could call a paying business, and Miranda says—but never mind about that. Whose picture was it that you saw? And how did you know that I—"

"By George, I believe I've got it with me," said Peter, slapping his pockets, while his heart beat quickly. Now or never! "Here it is, sure enough," he added gleefully, and laid the small *carte de visite*, the

sole trophy of his midnight quest, face upward on the table.

There was a moment of suspense while the old man carefully adjusted his glasses and took the old photograph up in his hand. Peter watched his face narrowly. Many years had passed. Would he—

"Why! Why!" exclaimed Walter Lord, in tones of deep surprise. "Why, how in Heaven's name, Mr. Clancy, did you get a picture of little Rosamond Curwood?"

XVII

ROSAMOND CURWOOD! Peter's heart skipped a beat and then raced on again. Could he have been mistaken? No—he had found the picture in her apartment, and it could be no other than Mary Blake. He was sure, positive.

Curwood! With a click, his mind fastened the connection. The name he had written in his notebook—the name in the old set of Shakespeares—Curwood, Winthrop Curwood!

Though he had been staggered for an instant, Peter resumed the conversation with scarcely a perceptible pause.

"It's Winthrop Curwood's daughter, isn't it?" he said smoothly, closely watching the old man's expression.

There was immediate and unqualified acquiescence in the eyes of Walter Lord.

"Yes; but where did you get it?" he asked again, wonderingly. "I thought—"

"Yes?" Peter encouraged, as the old man hesitated.

"It seems odd to me that you should have her picture."

There was a slight emphasis on the pronoun. For the first time, Walter Lord looked at Peter with almost a hint of—was it suspicion?—in his eyes.

"I just ran across it in looking through an old desk," Peter hastened to explain. "I kept it because it's such a pretty kid, and the photograph so well taken. Looks as if she was just going to speak. I don't know the original—"

"But you knew who it was!" Lord's tone was puzzled.

"Yes, I knew who it was," said Peter easily. "Beautiful little thing, isn't she? It was a fine subject for you, and I must say you've done it justice."

Peter had struck a very vulnerable spot. Walter Lord's faint feeling of suspicion, if so strong a term may be used, melted away before the frank praise of his work.

"Not bad, not bad at all," he said, smiling now. "As you say, she was a beautiful child—the most beautiful child I ever saw," he went on dreamily, "except her mother—Anne Blakeslee."

"Anne Blakeslee — Anne Blake," Peter repeated to himself thoughtfully. "So you knew her mother, too!" he said aloud. "Isn't it strange how things come about? The world is a little place, after all."

The trite banality of this last remark did not strike Walter Lord. Instead, he seemed to think it quite an effective sentence.

"The world is small, Mr. Clancy! Yes, the world is a little place, after all," he agreed. "Here you drop into Hobart Falls so unexpectedly, and come to my house, which you couldn't possibly have heard about, and all the while you have a picture of one of Anne Blakeslee's children in your pocket!"

His innocent wonder made Peter feel almost ashamed; but the matter was much too important for squeamishness, he assured himself.

"So there was more than one child," he said quickly. "Were they all as beautiful as this—this Rosamond?"

"There were only two," replied Lord. "Two twin girls. The other was named for her mother."

"Anne?"

"Yes—Anne and Rosamond," said the old man gently.

"Did you know them well?" asked Peter. "It's such a funny coincidence, altogether. Makes me sort of curious about them."

Walter Lord leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and gazed out at the red gold of the summer sunset.

"Yes," he said softly. "Yes, I knew them well. That is, I knew the children—and their mother. I knew her best of all!"

There was something in Walter Lord's quaint old face which kept Peter silent. He could not interrupt with the questions which were burning to be asked. He would let the story come in its own way.

After a moment the old man went on.

"Yes," he repeated, with a little sigh. "I knew Anne Blakeslee. You might say I had always known her. She lived on a farm up in the hills, and we both went to the little brick schoolhouse down at the end of the village. Guess you didn't see it. It's just around the turn of the road."

"No," said Peter softly, so as not to break the thread of the old man's thought.

"Yes — we saw each other every day, until I went away to high school. When Tom died, and I had to come home to stay, Anne Blakeslee had grown up in the mean time, and she was beautiful—beautiful in soul as well as in body—or perhaps it wouldn't have happened."

A purple cloud drifted across the setting sun. Its shadow fell softly upon the old face.

"What was it that happened?" the younger man gently prompted.

"Why" — Walter Lord roused himself with an effort—"it was about that time she must have come to know Winthrop Curwood. It's sort of an odd story. Maybe you'd like to hear—"

"I would indeed!"

Peter was conscious, as the old man proceeded with the story, that it was the drama of Walter Lord's own life. Sometimes he forgot Peter altogether; at other times he was aware of the younger man only as a ship that passes in the night. He was speaking him in passing. It did not matter how much he told. They would never see each other again, in all human probability. As one sometimes may tell a stranger the thoughts of an overburdened heart—thoughts which would forever remain hidden from one's nearest and dearest—so Walter Lord told Peter, without himself realizing it, the story of his life's tragedy—the story of Anne Blakeslee.

"I never knew when she saw Winthrop Curwood first—not that it matters." The old voice was low and gentle. Throughout, the pronoun was spoken with such reverence as to suggest that it would have been written with a capital—as if, instead of Anne Blakeslee, a goddess were its antecedent. "She must have known him pretty well when I saw them together for the first time. I was going up to her house one day, soon after I got back from school, and they were standing just where a little wood road, from up the mountain, comes in to the saw-mill road, about two miles west of the village. They didn't see me, though I was in plain sight, a hundred yards away. He was standing with his hat off—and a look on his face. It was a fine face, too. Just then he reached out, sort of uncertainly, and took her hand. I thought I'd better go home, and come back to see Anne some other day; but she caught sight of me, before I'd gone more than a few steps, and called to me. I went back, of course, and

I saw him again, climbing up the steep road—it was hardly more than a trail—and feeling ahead of him with a long stick. It was then I saw, from the way he moved, that he was blind."

"Blind!" echoed Peter, aghast. "Blind, you say?"

"Yes," replied the old man sadly. "He was stone blind. Anne told me about him, with tears standing in her eyes. He had a little house over on the far side of the mountain, and lived there all alone. He had come there, she said, while he could still see a little, and built the place with some help from a man down in Job's Corners, who brought up his supplies. Nobody knew anything about him, but it was easy to see, she said, that he was a gentleman, and educated. And indeed he was. I saw him myself, several times, after they—after they were married."

He paused on that word. The golden sun, freeing itself from the passing cloud, lit up the kind old face with its pitiful dyed hair, and the quaintly youthful garments, and made of them a thing touching, tender, wistful in its appeal. He went on almost immediately.

"He was a wonderful-looking man, tall and straight. His voice—I don't know how to describe it—it was clear and deep, like the sound of a big bell. But I don't think it was any of these things that most appealed to Anne Blakeslee. It was his helplessness, his pitiful blindness. She talked to me about it quite often that fall. I knew by that time that there was no hope for me. I knew that she loved this stranger. She said I was the only person she could talk freely to. Her father was a hard man, and she the only child. She told me, at last, that she was going to marry Winthrop Curwood, whether Mr. Blakeslee consented or not. She was high-spirited in those days—headstrong, you might call it—and when she'd made up her mind that Curwood should not live alone, she—you may not understand this part of the story, Mr. Clancy. Her father didn't, and cut her off completely. He refused to see her, and left the farm and everything he had to a distant cousin, who lives there to-day. A selfish wretch!"

For the first time there was bitterness in the old man's tone.

"I shall understand—you may be sure of that," said Peter, with quiet sympathy. "Tell me what happened."

"Well, one night, just at dusk, Anne Blakeslee climbed this side of the mountain for the last time. She took some clothing with her, and a few other things. She didn't tell me much, but I can imagine—knowing her. She went in quietly, and told him she had come to stay. He—he protested. He pointed out the sacrifice she was making. She overruled all his objections, as Anne Blakeslee would know how to do, and then—"

The room was growing dark. A big white moth flew in through the open window and fluttered softly among the lilies.

"The next morning, they went together down the far side of the mountain, and were married by Father O'Connell. Anne sent me a letter, and I went to see them. Of all the people hereabouts I was the only one who visited them, and I only went when Anne sent for me, which wasn't often. Somehow Curwood, in his quiet, dignified way, made me feel—well, anyway, I never went except when Anne needed me; but in those few times it seemed to me that they were managing very well. They seemed quite comfortable, as long as Curwood lived. He was an Englishman, I think. At least, he spoke differently from us. I'm quite sure he must have been English, though Anne never told me anything about him. He did not wish it—that was all she ever said. If she was satisfied, it was enough for me.

"I found out later, when he died, that he had only what they call an annuity, which ended with his life. Anne had known it all along, and had saved what she could, which wasn't a great deal. The two little girls were growing up, and it took something to care for them. They came down here to the schoolhouse every day for several winters, and I used to see them often."

Though he did not say so, Peter knew full well that Walter Lord had taken pains to keep an eye on the children of Anne Blakeslee.

"They were interesting children—very interesting. All children and young people are, of course; but these two were more so than any I ever came in contact with. Rosamond was beautiful beyond anything I or anybody ever saw, I think. I used to delight in taking pictures of her. I could show you a dozen, up in the gallery; and she was always more than glad to sit for me. She knew pretty well how she looked—didn't need any one to tell her; and who

could blame anything so lovely as that for knowing it was lovely? Might as well blame a water lily that looks at itself all day in a pond. But Anne, poor little Anne—she was always my favorite.”

Peter glanced up in surprise. That Anne Blake should have appealed, even as a child, to any one, was a decidedly new thought to him. Perhaps it was because Walter Lord was so kindly and sympathetic, and because she was the daughter of Anne Blakeslee.

“She was always an odd child,” Walter Lord went on, with a little laugh. “I remember one time when Anne sent for me. Her father was very ill. She had heard of it, and wanted me to take him a message. Well, I went up there, and little Anne, who must have been about five years old, happened to meet me just at the edge of the woods, near the house. She was shy, and started to run. I called her, told her my name, and gave her some candy—one of those long peppermint sticks we used to like. She took it and thanked me very prettily, and then she ran on ahead, and I heard her say to her mother, in such a funny little awed tone:

“‘Mother! Mr. God’s coming to see you.’”

Peter laughed, and the old man chuckled softly.

“She certainly was an odd child, was Anne. She was naturally shy, and wasn’t as fond of coming up into the gallery as her sister was, because she was afraid that I would want to take her picture—a thing she absolutely refused to let me do. I did entice her into the gallery sometimes, with books and candy, and some of the other little things that children love. I had an idea that it might be nice to get a photograph of her for her mother. I had plenty of Rosamond, but had never been able to overcome Anne’s prejudice against sitting for me.”

“What a funny idea for a kid to have!” said Peter thoughtfully. “I know some boys would almost as soon go to a dentist as to a photographer, but I never knew a girl, of any age, who didn’t love it.”

“Well,” said Walter Lord slowly, “Anne had her reason, poor little thing. She was high-strung, and sensitive almost to the point of obsession about—but there,” he broke off, “she might have trusted me. I’d never have put the poor child—Anne Blakeslee’s child—to shame. And I finally got what I was after.” Even though many

years had passed, there was a little triumph in his voice at the recollection. “I got her to playing with a doll in the sitter’s chair, and one day I caught her in just the position I wanted. Would you like to see? I know just where—”

“I certainly would,” said Peter.

Walter Lord jumped up from his chair, threw the end of a cigarette out of the window, and disappeared up a small back stairway, which led directly from the room. Peter heard him walking about overhead for a moment. Presently he reappeared, with something in his hand.

He laid it down, and lighted a lamp on the table, for the room was now almost dark.

“There she is,” he said, leaning over Peter’s shoulder, and pointing to the little old photograph. “Whatever has happened to her since it was taken, I’ll wager that that is the only photograph in existence of Anne Curwood!”

XVIII

PETER took the yellowed card in his hands, and looked at it long and eagerly. For nearly a month he would have been ready to pay almost any price for a portrait of Anne Blake. Now, here in his hand, he held the thing he had been wishing for—and, for his purpose, it might as well have been a piece of blank pasteboard—or so he thought at the moment.

The child face of Anne Curwood was shown in profile, facing the left. The tell-tale mark, which had probably changed but little in the succeeding years—the birthmark by which Peter hoped to identify her without shadow of doubt—appeared not at all. This was the way in which Walter Lord had shielded a child’s sensitiveness. He had, with kindly and careful purpose, selected a view which showed the little face unmarred.

That there was a hidden disfigurement, Peter had no reasonable doubt, both because of what Lord had already said, and because of his own previous knowledge; but he must make sure. He must force Lord to tell him, to describe—

“Why, she’s a beautiful kid,” Peter said abruptly. “I thought, from what you said, that she must be as ugly as the dickens. Why in the world was she so funny about letting you—”

“Poor little thing! It wasn’t funny,” said the old man compassionately. “If

either you or I had the same reason, we'd have felt the same way."

"But I don't see—" Peter began.

"No, you don't," said Lord quickly. "I took pains that no one should see it."

"See what?" persisted Peter.

"Why," said the old man hesitatingly, "the little thing was born with a dreadful mark on the other side of her face—the right side."

"I knew it was the right side," thought Peter swiftly. "That would have been the side in shadow, when the cabman saw Anne Blake standing before her sister's dressing table. I told O'Malley it must be the right side!"

He was thinking this even while he listened attentively.

"That's why I took her in profile," Lord was saying; "so it wouldn't show, you see. The child was painfully sensitive about it, and so was her mother, though of course not to the same extent. I wanted them both to be pleased, and I knew Anne Blakeslee must hate to be reminded of—oh, Mr. Clancy, such a horrible experience! I hate, even now, to think of it."

Peter did not say, "Don't think of it, then." He wanted to hear, to learn every detail. He did not want to miss even a remote chance; so he looked eagerly, inquiringly, into the old man's face, but said nothing.

"It was awful, terrible," Walter Lord went on, as Peter knew he must now that he was fully started. "It wasn't so very long before Anne and Rosamond were born. She was—she had gone into the woods, to pick blackberries or something, I think. There was a sort of clearing behind some big rocks, not so very far from the house. There—I learned it all much later—she came upon a vicious, half-witted tramp, who was harboring up on the mountain. He was squatting on the ground, dressing a chicken he'd stolen, and she didn't see him until she was right beside him. He looked at her, and leaped up. She was a woman, beautiful, alone, and, as he thought, far from help. He bent over and crept toward her, with his hands all bloody. She screamed, and—and he caught her by the throat, and—"

The old man lifted his clenched hands and pressed them, quivering, against his forehead. Peter sat in horrified silence.

"If she hadn't screamed," Walter Lord went on, after a moment—"if she hadn't

been able to fight, and keep on screaming—God!"

Again he paused, but after a long, shuddering breath, he continued:

"Curwood was inside the house, but he heard her. He had almost a sixth sense of direction, and all his senses were preternaturally acute, but he was blind! Think of it! To be blind, and to hear some one—some one you loved—calling—calling for help! He got there just in time. The fiend heard him coming, and made off through the woods. Anne was ill, terribly ill. For a long time it seemed as if she could not live. It was a fearful time for—for every one who cared for her. A few days before her twin babies were born, the body of the—of the wretch was found at the bottom of a cliff. There were black marks of fingers on his throat; but he was known to be a worthless scoundrel, and the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of accidental death."

There was a long silence, broken only by the call of an owl, away off in the woods.

"Who-o-o, who-o-o!"

After a time, Walter Lord went on in a slightly altered tone.

"I don't know how it was, but little Rosamond never showed the slightest effect of her mother's fearful experience, while Anne, poor little Anne, not only will bear a terrible birthmark as long as she lives, but her whole character seemed to be affected by it. Whether it was the shock to her mother's entire nervous system, or whether it was because she was not like other children, I can't tell, but she was painfully, almost morbidly, shy and retiring. She came down here to school only when she was forced to do so. The rest of the time she spent with her father, whom she positively adored. I think the fact that he was blind, and could not see how badly she was disfigured, may have had something to do with it, for on this point she was abnormally sensitive and self-conscious. I don't believe, strange as it may seem, that her father ever knew anything about it. There was no necessity to tell him, and I can't think any one would have been cruel enough to do so. The few times I saw them together he showed no consciousness that there was anything amiss with his little favorite, Anne. He would stroke her smooth little face and call her his 'beautiful, dear little girl.' In fact, so far as he could tell, there was no striking difference in the ap-

pearance of the two children, for in feature they were almost exactly alike, as you may be able to see from these photographs."

Peter studied them again, as they lay side by side in the warm glow of the lamp. It had not struck him before, but as he compared them, feature by feature, he could see that in childhood, at least, the two sisters must have looked startlingly alike, though even at that time the expression of the two faces was strikingly dissimilar.

There was the same thick, rich, dark hair, the same smooth, broad brow, the same delicate modeling of feature; but in the case of Mary—Rosamond, he corrected himself—the eyes and mouth were laughing, careless, and gay, while Anne's were serious, quiet, almost tragic—a thing not good to see in one so young.

"All kinds of possibilities there," thought Peter, with a slight shake of the head. "Plenty of intelligence and nervous force—a kind of courage, too, I should imagine, with a strong little chin like that. The devil's own lay-out for a girl, handicapped as she was!"

Walter Lord, looking at the portraits and not at Peter Clancy, did not notice the detective's abstraction.

"Yes," he said, "they did look a lot alike, in a way; but the resemblance was only physical, and they showed more and more difference as they grew up. Their father died when they were about fifteen, and after that her mother had more difficulty than ever in controlling Rosamond. I saw a good deal of them at that time, and I knew she was worried, though she talked little about it. Even at that age Rosamond was careless, reckless, and extravagant. She always longed for finery, and when I brought books for little Anne, I always took a bit of ribbon or some such foolishness to Rosamond. It was wonderful to see what the child could do with the few things at her disposal. She had a sense of dress and adornment that was really remarkable."

Peter remembered that he had read, somewhere, that Mary Blake had often been called the most skillfully costumed woman on the stage.

"Little Anne had it, too, in a different way. Her clothes were always quiet and pretty and suitable. Dress seemed to be a kind of natural instinct with both of the girls, but Rosamond's taste was almost—almost theatrical."

Peter nodded to himself.

"I suppose it was a desire for admiration," Lord went on in his gentle, kindly voice, "that was the cause of—of the trouble that came to poor little Rosamond."

Peter pricked up his ears. Was he to learn something, at last? Something of the secret, perhaps, that Mary Blake thought no one would ever know—the reason why she—

"What trouble?" asked Peter, aloud, carefully restraining his eagerness.

Walter Lord's chin was on his hand, and his eyes were bent upon the two little pictures. He spoke slowly, sadly.

"It didn't happen until after their mother passed away. I could always thank God for that. The girls were eighteen then, well grown, tall, and graceful, and Rosamond most beautiful—magnificent—though I always thought that Anne—"

The old photographer paused for an instant, and then caught the thread of his narrative up again.

"Well, no one knew exactly how it happened. On the mountain, beyond that valley over there"—he pointed through the window, where a full, bright moon lit hill and vale with tender radiance—"on the far side of the mountain there had sprung up a summer colony of city people. We saw them, once in a while, riding through here on horseback—a gay lot of young people, rich and careless. How Rosamond met—the man—Anne never knew. She loved her sister passionately, devotedly, but Rosamond never confided in her. All Anne knew was that Rosamond went off for long walks by herself. She would be gone all day, and would come home laughing and happy, with a brilliant color in her face and her eyes alight. Then, one day, she did not come back. Anne watched, in sleepless agony, all through the night. In the morning she came down to me.

"We never heard from Rosamond but once—only once, and that was the next day. She wrote a letter to her sister, which Anne never showed me. I don't know whether she knew the name of the man. All she said to me was, 'She's never coming back, Uncle Walter!' Then she covered her poor face with her arm and laid her head against the wall. 'She's not married to him,' she sobbed, 'and she says—oh, God—she says she doesn't care!'"

"So that was it!" thought Peter. "That was Mary Blake's secret. Good God! How shall I tell Morris? A young, pleas-

ure-loving, untaught, unmoral creature! And he thinks her perfect."

Old Walter Lord talked on sadly, reminiscently, but for a long time Peter did not hear what he was saying. The detective was thinking:

"What shall I tell Morris? How shall I tell Morris?"

XIX

WHEN Peter awoke, very early the next morning, though the problem was still the same, the form of his inner question had slightly changed.

"How much need I tell Morris?" he asked himself. "If Mary Blake never is found, why dig up the sad, sordid story? It must have happened ten years ago, and perhaps she had redeemed herself. Who can tell? It's a thankless job, chucking stones is, Peter! If what O'Malley and I doped out turns out to be true, and Anne, in spite of the virtues that old Lord attributes to her—if Anne, for the sake of her clever sister's money, or from jealousy of her beauty—h-m!"

He broke off here, to wonder how the sisters had come together after their separation. Lord evidently knew nothing about it. So far as Peter could learn, he was quite unaware that they had ever met again.

After recovering from the shock of Lord's disclosure in regard to Rosamond, Peter had carefully and skillfully questioned him. The talk lasted far into the night, but all he had found out was this:

Upon Rosamond's disappearance from Hobart Falls, Anne had retired absolutely within herself. All that winter she lived alone in the small house on the other side of the mountain, and never came at all to the village. Lord had gone up to see her many times, and at last she confided to him that she had almost no money at all.

He didn't say it in so many words, but Peter gathered that the generous old man had offered to share what little he had with her, and had been refused.

"When summer came," he told Peter, "without saying anything to me, she went over and got work from the rich city people in Fennimore Park."

Peter understood that the old man was very angry when he found it out, but that it had had no effect on Anne's unyielding spirit. She continued to take washing and to do day's work for the summer people. There was nothing else to be done. She

was too proud to take money she had not earned, and this seemed to be the only way in which she could make a livelihood.

And then, one day late in the fall, Lord had received a letter from her, saying that she was going away as a sort of maid or companion to an old lady, a Mrs. Rutherford, who had a cottage in Fennimore Park. She told him that she hoped, before very long, to be able to send the money he had loaned her on her father's watch and an old seal ring.

Lord had been anxious for fear Mr. Clancy might think he had exacted this security. Peter assured him that he readily understood that it must have been forced upon him.

"And did she send for them?" Peter had asked.

It transpired that she had, and that Lord had returned the watch and ring, in Mrs. Rutherford's care, to the Holland House in New York. That was the last he had ever heard of Anne Curwood. He had made a pilgrimage to Fennimore Park the next summer, only to find that Mrs. Rutherford had gone abroad, and that no one knew anything about Anne.

The following year he succeeded in seeing Mrs. Rutherford, who was obviously, from Lord's tone, an awe-inspiring lady. She had dimly remembered that she had once had a maid named Anne Curwood, but the young woman was no longer in her employ, and, unfortunately, she could give Mr. Lord no address.

Peter was going over all this in his mind, as he bathed and dressed. He was in a somewhat despondent mood for a man of his sanguine temperament, and rather wished he had not humored Walter Lord's absurd request that he should sit for his photograph before he left in the morning. To be sure, he had refused once, on the ground that his train left at half past nine; but when he saw how disappointed Lord was not to have this souvenir of what was evidently an event in the old man's life, he hastily relented. As a result, he was up and dressed at seven o'clock.

He had heard his host pottering about the kitchen before he was up. When he presently descended the carpeted front stairs, he found an ample and savory breakfast awaiting him. It was rapidly—and, by Walter Lord, gleefully—dispatched.

"The light is fine this morning!" the old enthusiast said, as he led the way up

the back stairs. "I'm going to make a good picture of you, Mr. Clancy. It's mighty kind of you to be willing to humor an old codger like me. I hope you won't mind the gallery being a bit dusty," he added, opening a gray-painted door. "I don't have much incentive, these days, to keep it spick and span, and I never have allowed Miranda to tidy up here since the day she carefully dusted six of my wet negatives!"

He laughed over his shoulder as he went into a closet for his plate holder.

Peter, left to his own devices for a moment, wandered about the room. It was an ordinary country photograph gallery, with the usual top and side lights, platform, screens, and chairs. The only odd thing about it was that the walls, from a chair rail at the bottom to well above the eye line, were completely covered with photographs. It was a big room, and there was not one inch of space wasted. It must have represented the enthusiastic work of a lifetime, and Walter Lord was obviously a good workman, for even the portraits, which, judging by the costumes, dated far back, were not badly faded.

"This is some collection you've got here," said Peter admiringly, as Lord came back into the room. "Wish I had time to look it all over!"

Lord laid his plates down on a table near by, and, smiling at the compliment, motioned Peter to a chair on the platform. Then he ducked under the black cloth of the camera, talking all the while.

"Yes, I've done a fairish amount of work in my time, Mr. Clancy, though a lot of it was gratis, as you may imagine. A little more to the left, please. I haven't made a lot of money, but I've had a splendid time. Chin up, just a little. Not quite so much. There, that's fine! Couldn't be better. I'll show you some things you may be interested in, in just a moment. Now, don't move, please!"

He slipped out from under the black cloth, caught up and adjusted the plate holder with expert hands, and then stood beside the camera, with the bulb ready.

"Imagine that you've just caught a two-pound trout, Mr. Clancy! That's what I want. That's fine, fine! Oh, that's going to be splendid, Mr. Clancy!" he said gleefully, as he manipulated the plates. "Now just once more, to make sure. A little to the right—there—and another fish!"

Peter laughed aloud. The shutter clicked. The old man was delighted.

"I caught that laugh of yours, Mr. Clancy, and that was just what I wanted to remember you by. It's good to be young, and to laugh. I don't believe you have a care in the world!"

Peter laughed inwardly, sardonically, at this. All the while he was thinking of Donald Morris. How much need he be told?

"Come over here, and I'll show you something pretty, Mr. Clancy." Walter Lord, having disposed of his precious plates, was again at Peter's side. "I think this is one of the most charming pictures I've ever made. See if you recognize it."

He led the way to a corner of the room, where some of the photographs were turning a little brown. Evidently they had been placed there years ago. He pointed to a cabinet-size picture, halfway up the wall.

Peter looked and saw, dressed in a fanciful costume of fluttering gauze, the figure of a slender child standing, fairylike, beside the trunk of a great beech. The flicker of sun and shadow was all about her, and her little oval face was alight with joy and mischief. The beauty of it caught Peter's breath.

"Why, it's Ma—Rosamond Curwood, isn't it?" he exclaimed. "And, by George, I'll say you're some artist, Mr. Lord!"

"It is lovely, isn't it?" said the old man happily. "I remember how I enjoyed taking it. Not many regular photographers were doing outdoor backgrounds at that time, but I had nothing here"—he glanced scornfully at the stiffly painted screens—"nothing that was suitable. I wanted to keep a memory of the way the child looked in that fairy dress. I saw her at the school in a little play, and persuaded her—not that there was any trouble about that—to sit for me. It was curious how well Rosamond acted in all the little entertainments they gave at the school. At the same time I don't think she was half as clever in that way as Anne; but of course Anne was so shy that she would never appear in public, and I imagine almost no one knew that she had any talent. I only found it out by accident."

Peter saw in this the old man's habitual defense of his favorite—a natural siding with the under dog.

"How was that?" he asked, to humor this kindly quality.

"Why," said Walter Lord reminiscently, "it started one day when I was going up to their house through the woods. I was walking along quietly, and suddenly I thought I heard some one talking, half singing, a little way to the left, behind a screen of young hemlock. The words, such as I could catch, sounded strangely familiar. My curiosity got the better of me, and I slipped quietly through the bushes and parted the hemlock branches. There, in a tiny, open glade, was little Anne, dancing lightly in the sunshine, and reciting:

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended—
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.

"You know, Mr. Clancy—the last part of 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'"

Peter was not any too familiar with Shakespeare, but he nodded in silent acquiescence, and the old man went on.

"I found out, after that, that she knew simply miles of Shakespeare. She used to recite for me, under strict pledge of secrecy, in the woods, on summer afternoons. You should have heard her, as little *Arthur*, in 'King John,' plead for her eyes—'Oh, spare mine eyes, if for no use but still to look on thee!' Her voice was enough to break one's heart; but, of course, she had no chance, poor child, with that dreadful mark on her face."

"Was it such a terrible disfigurement?" asked Peter, eager to get an accurate description. "Where was it, and how large?"

"It was just here." Walter Lord placed his curved palm upon his lower jaw, with the fingers extending up on the cheek. "It was almost like the mark of a hand—a bloody hand." The old man frowned and sadly shook his head. "Too bad, too bad! It wrecked the poor child's life."

"Yes—too bad, too bad," echoed Peter absently, the while he made a mental note of the probable shape and position of the identifying mark by which he hoped at last to recognize Anne Blake. "Well," he added, rousing himself and looking at his watch, "I'm afraid I ought to be going, Mr. Lord. How long will it take to get to the station?"

"Oh, not more than ten minutes," answered the old man, dragging out his own watch and comparing it with Peter's. "You've twenty minutes to spare. I want to write down your address, so I can send

you prints of the pictures I took of you just now. I'm pretty sure you'll like 'em."

He went over and began fumbling in his desk for something to write upon. Peter followed and stood beside him. He gave Lord his private address on East Thirty-Fifth Street.

As the old man seemed to be having some trouble in finding what he sought, Peter waited, glancing absently about. His eye was arrested by a picture on the wall—a man and girl on horseback. Could he be mistaken? He stepped nearer. No, he was right. He had never seen the girl before, but the man, the man on the left of the photograph, was Donald Morris. What was he doing here? How had it happened—

Suppressing an ejaculation, Peter turned to the old photographer. Making his voice quite casual, he asked:

"Who's the good-looking chap on horseback over here?"

Lord looked up, following Peter's pointing finger.

"Oh, that!" he said. "I don't know the man's name. The lady is a Miss Stone—lives over at Fennimore Park. She's quite a friend of mine. Rides through here two or three times a season, and is always having her picture taken with some man or other. You'll find several of 'em along there. Now, where the dickens? Oh, here it is!"

He pulled from a crowded pigeonhole a small, dusty, black leather notebook, dragging a little heap of letters and papers out with it.

"Now, Mr. Clancy, give me the address again, if you don't mind."

Peter, his mind full of conjectures, leaned over the old man as he sat at his desk, and absently repeated his address. As he did so, his eye lighted upon one of the letters which had fallen to the floor.

Automatically he stooped to pick it up. As he lifted it, inadvertently he caught the words:

Money order, and if you will return my father's ring, which I value, and the—

Peter's heart almost stopped beating as he looked at the writing. His brain was in a whirl. He must leave immediately, and he had no time to weigh problems of right and wrong. He only knew one thing—he must have this letter of Anne Curwood's—of Anne Blake's.

The old man's head was bent above his notebook. With a swift motion, Peter, feeling like an unmitigated hound, slipped the letter into his pocket.

"I'll make up some story—I'll return it later," he thought confusedly. "I'm afraid I've got to hustle to make the train, Mr. Lord," he said aloud, grasping the old man's hand. "You've been awfully good to me, and I do appreciate it. I'll write to you, and I hope you won't forget me. Don't come down. I'll just grab my bag and beat it. Thank you a thousand times for your hospitality. If you ever come to New York, don't forget that you have my address. Good-by—good-by!"

In the midst of Walter Lord's hearty farewells, and invitations to come again, Peter was gone.

XX

AGAIN, as Peter made his swift way to the station, the question which had been hammering in his brain took another form:

"How much can I keep from telling Morris? How much can I keep to myself till I can get time to think things out? It's utterly absurd, Peter! It can't be, and yet if—if—but how much can I keep from telling Morris?"

The answer to the question which was uppermost in Peter's rapid thoughts was destined, within the next few minutes, to be influenced in a most unexpected manner. He had scarcely entered the small and stuffy waiting room of the Hobart Falls station when, at the sound of his footsteps on the bare boards, a man looked out of the little grated ticket window—the same man from whom he had received, in reply to his inquiry as to telegrams on the previous evening, so wholesale an order of negatives.

"There's a wire here for you now, if your name's Clancy—Peter Clancy," the agent said, turning back to refer to a yellow sheet of paper which lay beside the telegraph instrument. "That was the name you said last night, wasn't it? It's just come in, not five minutes ago—night letter. Sign here, please."

He slipped the telegram and a thumb pad through below the grating, watching Peter curiously the while. Evidently the residents of Hobart Falls were not used to receiving night letters.

Peter scrawled his name on the pad, and hastily caught up the sheet that bore the

message. What had happened? What new complication—

The telegram was written out in the operator's none too legible hand. It was maddening, for not very far away Peter could hear his train whistling for a crossing. He wanted to get back to town—to talk to O'Malley—to think—

Slowly, perforce, he puzzled out the unpunctuated sentences:

Full story M. B. disappearance to-night's *Earth*—devil to pay—think F. J. must have spilled beans—D. M. all broken up—left for Fennimore Park private car with sister night train—Fennimore Park near you—report there—for God's sake make him understand no leak this office.

O'MALLEY.

The train thundered into the station and started out again, but Peter took no notice of it. His plans had undergone a complete change.

The agent, who was also the expressman as well as the telegraph operator, was surprised to find the intending passenger still there, though not so much so as he would have been if he had not received the queer telegram. He was more or less prepared for the question with which the stranger greeted his reappearance.

"What's the next train for Fennimore Park?" Peter asked.

"Ain't no train for there on this line," answered the agent. "Ye have to go back to the junction and ketch the Mountain Express there. Ye should have taken No. 53 down."

He jerked his head in the direction of the rapidly receding rumble.

Peter's silence was more profane than any speech. Then a sudden thought struck him. He threw a withering glance at the indifferent agent, and jumped to the door opposite to the one on the platform. He was just in time to see a tired flivver moving slowly down the dusty road.

"Josh!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Josh!"

His lungs were strong and his intent was sincere. Slowly the old car came to a standstill, and the driver, craning his long neck, looked back down the road.

"Ye want me?" he bellowed.

Peter answered with a peremptory wave of the hand. The creaking car turned in a cloud of dust, and came slowly back.

"How far is it to Fennimore Park from here?" Peter asked, as soon as Josh was within reasonable calling distance.

"Pretty close to twenty mile," said the countryman. "Why?"

Peter eyed the car with some disfavor.

"Is the old boat good for it?"

"Ye betcha she is," said Josh enthusiastically. "I told ye she's the best car in town. Want I should take ye there? I'll do it fer five."

Peter wasted no more time. He jumped, bag and all, into the back seat.

"Shoot!" was all he said.

He was silent for almost the entire way, thinking—thinking—thinking.

The old car bumped and skidded over the mountain roads, and groaned and labored up the long, rough hills. Peter kept himself in by clinging to the iron braces of the top, but aside from these automatic efforts at self-preservation he was practically unconscious of the way they went.

A strange thought had come to him in Walter Lord's old photographic studio—a thought so odd and bizarre that at first it seemed absolutely impossible and insane. He began piecing things together. Bit by bit, apparently unconnected scraps of information were fitted in, now this way and now that. Once, making sure that the driver was completely occupied with the difficulties of the rough and winding road, Peter took from his pocket the letter he had appropriated.

"Stolen, damn it!" he thought disgustedly. "Mine's a hell of a job for a decent man! But if I could prove, even to myself, that—"

He looked long and wonderingly at the letter before he slipped it back into an inner pocket.

"Mary, apparently, took no clothes at all," he thought, going back for the thousandth time over the old ground, "and Anne took a big trunk. Well, that would fit either way. The large sum of money left at the bank, subject to Anne's order as well as Mary's—yes, that would fit either way; but the blood on the scarf, and on the floor! I don't see, unless—by George, I'll bet—"

The driver heard his passenger slap his leg with a resounding thwack. He turned his head slightly.

"Mosquito?" he threw over his shoulder. "Did ye git him?"

"No—yes—I'm not sure," said Peter, coming back to the present. "How far are we now from Fennimore Park? Do we pass through any town on the way?" he

added, his mind reverting to immediate necessities.

"We'll be there inside of twenty minutes"—Josh answered the questions in order—"and we pass through Tollenville about a mile this side. That's quite a big place. Why?"

"Think I could get yesterday's New York papers anywhere there?" asked Peter. "Must keep up with the times, you know!"

"Oh, sure ye can," said Josh easily. "Must have 'em at the Tollen House, I should think. I'd like to stop there, anyway," and he drew the back of his hand, in a suggestive gesture, across his mouth.

"All right," said Peter, with a comprehending grin. "If it's that kind of a place, I may get the paper I want; so don't forget to stop."

"I won't," said Josh, with evident sincerity, and Peter retired again into his thoughts.

It seemed to him not many minutes later when they pulled up in front of a big, ugly, red brick hotel, with many wooden porches and gay, striped awnings.

"Tollen House," remarked Josh briefly, and disappeared around the corner of the building.

Peter entered the lobby and anxiously inquired for the New York *Earth* of yesterday's date. One was found for him, much to his satisfaction. He gave the porter, who brought it to him, a generous tip, and dashed out to the waiting car, which looked more weary and woebegone than ever.

Josh was nowhere in sight. While Peter waited for the driver, he ran a quick eye over the paper.

"No wonder Donald Morris was in a devil of a stew!" he thought, as he absorbed the principal article on the front page, with its blatant headlines and its large half-tone picture of Mary Blake. "Wonder if he could think our office would be guilty of letting his name appear! Gee, that would be a rotten thing for a client! 'Absence first discovered by Donald Morris, son of Steven Morris, and heir to the Morris millions,'" he read disgustedly. "It's a beastly shame. I'll bet his house was besieged by reporters before the story had been on the street ten minutes. Nobody could have leaked but Jones, confound him! Bound to get some publicity for his leading lady, whether she liked it or not, and a lot for himself into the bar-

gain. 'Frederick Jones, Miss Blake's manager, interviewed'—and in pretty good-sized type, too. Oh, damn!"

At that moment Josh returned. Wiping his mouth with a soiled red handkerchief, he took his place at the wheel.

"Some hooch!" he remarked, with a wise, sidelong wink, and the car started laboriously up the road.

Peter, still looking at the offending paper, rapidly formulated his defense, as they crawled up the steep mountainside. The roadbed here was of red shale, smooth and well kept, in strong contrast to the rocky roads they had been traversing.

Soon they came to a great stone gateway and a lodge. They were held up here, while the lodge keeper telephoned the Atterbury cottage, where, he said, Mr. Donald Morris was stopping.

"It's all right. You can go right up, sir," he said, returning after a moment. "Do you know where it is? Well, you take the first turn to the right after you pass the inn, and it's the last house before you come to the church. You can't miss it. Thank you, sir!"

"Some style!" grumbled Josh, as the car moved away. "Would ye think this was once a free country?"

He addressed the world at large, and Peter did not trouble to answer. He had too much to think about even to notice the exquisite woodland park through which they were passing—the great old, mossy trees, the broad, red road, the ferns and wild flowers, the primitive forest, broken here and there by wide, velvet lawns and low, broad, picturesque cottages. He was the first, however, to realize that they had reached their journey's end.

"There's the church, Josh," he said. "This will be the house. Drive in and wait a minute till I make sure."

He sprang up the two low steps, almost before the car had stopped. In a second he returned, to slip a bill and some jingling coins into Josh's outstretched hand.

"A little more hooch," he explained the coins with a wink, and Josh trundled away with a large admiration of his passenger in his leathery old heart.

The servant from whom Peter had made his inquiries again met him at the door, as he crossed the porch.

"Mrs. Atterbury would like to see you before you go up to Mr. Morris, if you please, sir," he said, and led the way

through a living room, which seemed endless to Peter, and out upon another wide veranda. "Mr. Clancy, ma'am," he announced, in a tone which disclaimed all responsibility for so plebeian a name, and softly vanished, leaving Peter face to face with Mrs. Francis Atterbury.

It was an ill moment for poor Peter, judging by the lady's expression.

"Mr. Clancy," she said, motioning slightly to a chair near the one in which she was seated, "this is a most unfortunate circumstance. My brother is quite overcome. He's really ill, yet I had to drag him up here, almost by force, last night. The reporters were simply besieging the house, and my brother was so nervously unstrung that I had to call in a doctor. I've seen it coming for a long time, and that terrible article in the newspaper yesterday was the last straw. You've seen it, I suppose?"

Her eyes narrowed as she keenly regarded Peter, and there was a drawing together of her handsome eyebrows which boded ill for him, if he could not assure her of his innocence in the matter.

"I had a wire from my partner early this morning," Peter replied, with the calm of conscious rectitude, "and I was able to get the paper at Tollenville on my way over. That was absolutely the first I knew that the story had leaked out. You must see, Mrs. Atterbury, from the tone of the entire article, that my office could not possibly have given it to the papers. A firm of detectives couldn't last long, if it was as leaky as that. I will admit," he added candidly, "that I advised Mr. Morris, some time ago, that our best bet was to give out the story, so as to get the help of the general public in tracing Miss Blake and her sister. You sometimes get information that way that you can't get by private inquiry. We would have been able, through personal connection with the papers, to keep Mr. Morris's name entirely out of it. I urged it on him several times, but he couldn't see it that way, and I was forced to give it up. We are acting entirely in Mr. Morris's interests," Peter added gravely, and with a dignity which was convincing, "and my office would not go contrary to his wishes, in any particular. I must ask you and Mr. Morris to believe this."

"Well," conceded Helena Atterbury, unbending slightly, "I suppose I must take your word for it, Mr. Clancy. My brother

seems to have a great deal of confidence in you; but I can't think—I can't see how Mr. Jones could have done such a thing. I believe your partner told Mr. Morris that the story could only have come from him. Why, I've entertained him at my house! He accepted my hospitality, and—"

"Mrs. Atterbury," Peter interrupted, with a shake of his head, "I'm afraid you don't understand what lengths people will go to for the sake of advertising. They sometimes seem to lose all sense of decency. I knew it was a risk to let Frederick Jones in on the game; but there were certain things we had to know, and he was bound, being her manager, to find out sooner or later—more probably sooner than later—that she'd disappeared. I hope you can see that we had no choice."

Helena Atterbury, in spite of her annoyance at the contretemps, could not fail to be impressed by the sincerity of the young detective's speech and manner. Her voice had lost much of its icy hauteur when she spoke again.

"Well, I won't detain you any longer, Mr. Clancy," she said, rising. "Mr. Mor-

ris is anxious to see you. He is in a very bad nervous condition, and I know you will be careful." Her natural woman's anxiety spoke in her voice and eyes, and her natural woman's curiosity prompted her to question: "Did you find out anything new yesterday? Can you give my brother any hope that—"

"I don't know, any more than I did before, where Miss Blake is, Mrs. Atterbury," he said frankly; "but I did find out some things—some things that I hope may prove of value. It was only last night and this morning that I got hold of the information, and I haven't had time to think it out; but I will say this much to you, Mrs. Atterbury—for almost the first time since I took the case, I have hope. I really feel that I have definite hope."

His clear, bright blue Irish eyes looked straight into hers, and Helena Atterbury's distaste and distrust melted slowly away before his frank gaze.

"I pray, for my brother's sake, that your hopes are well founded, Mr. Clancy," she said. "Come with me, and I will take you up to him."

(To be continued in the June number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

VARIATIONS UPON OMAR

Lo, spring is here with all his ancient lies,
Throwing the dust of dreams into our eyes;
And every little bird and bud and river
Talks of the love, the love that never dies!

Spring after spring I waited till you came,
Spring after spring whispered to me your name;
And now at last spring keeps her broken word,
And I, love's fool, must burn in quenchless flame!

But what if spring for once should turn out true,
And love of you for me and me for you
Be of those dreams that outlast all the springs,
And in the fields of heaven still keep their dew?

Fool that I am, to dream I still can keep
A dream so sweet, while others fall on sleep!
Well, though it vanish, I shall keep it still,
When on the hills I lay my head and weep,

And to Earth Mother cry out in my pain,
And rave on a gold face not seen again—

In all the bitter sorrow of that hour,
Still shall I know I have not loved in vain!

Richard Leigh

A Good Bad Man

"IT AIN'T ALWAYS SO MUCH WHAT YOU ARE AS WHO YOU'RE
WITH THAT COUNTS"

By William Slavens McNutt

I'VE been messing around at this business of being a sheriff for a good many years one way and another since I first moseyed out here to this Oklahoma country when I was a gangly-legged, trouble-hunting young kid always raring to go.

I started in being a deputy when I first lit out here, and them was days when being a deputy meant doing something besides running an errand now and then and shifting around with papers on a desk for a while. Then I got to be a marshal, and betwixt that and being a sheriff I been in the business of making the bad people behave and keeping the good people protected ever since.

Looking over 'em now, as I call 'em up to mind—the bad and good people that I've mixed with—it does seem to me like as if the bad might have been pretty good if they hadn't been fighting on the wrong side, while lots of the good people would 'a' been terrible, only they happened to be fighting on the right side. What I'm trying to get at is this—it seems to me as if it ain't always so much what you are as who you're with that counts.

When I first come down in this country, and started deputizing around with a star pinned onto my shirt, a couple o' fast guns hung onto my belt, and the idea in my young head that I was prob'ly just about the bravest and most plumb reckless an' generally admirable defender o' the peace o' the people and the power o' the government that ever was, I run into young Alvin Stengel, who'd just drifted out here from Boston.

Alvin had quite a little pile o' money to invest, and the idea that he was going to establish himself in some kind of a business in these parts and grow up with the country. He was a college boy, a fellow that

had went through Harvard, but he wasn't nothing at all like a lot of the funny papers and the funny story writers make out a college man to be.

He was a big young animal in them days, good-looking, well dressed, and full o' the old Nick. The town was wide open then, and while he was looking around to see what kind of a business he might invest in, he was doing a little drinking and poker playing for himself. I seen him around here and there several times for about a month. One night late I went into Bob Grasty's old place to get a couple of drinks before I turned in, and I swarmed up to the bar right alongside o' this fellow Stengel, who was standing there drinking alone.

I didn't say nothing to him nor him to me. I called for my drink and stood there leaning my elbow on the bar, and a fellow behind me stumbled and kind o' jostled me. I sort o' fell against Stengel a little bit, just as he was lifting his glass to his lips, and he spilled some o' the liquor down over his vest.

"'Scuse me," I said to him. "This fellow bumped into me an' shoved me over against you."

Stengel didn't say anything. He just looked at me, starting with the crown o' my hat, and let his eyes run down over my frame until they got to my feet. From the look on his face, I made out that he didn't like the scenery. By the time he was looking at my shoes, it seemed like he was just plumb disgusted with the view.

He took out a handkerchief, wiped the liquor off his vest, and turned away from me without saying a word. Didn't walk away, mind you—he just turned his back and stood there, drank the rest of the liquor that was in his glass, set it down on the bar, and called for another one.

Now I could get mad in them days without exerting myself at all. It was a terrible easy thing for me to get mad at somebody that I didn't like a lot, and a lot easier to get all angered up at somebody I did like.

I liked this fellow Stengel. I'd never spoke to him, but I had took note of him before, and I sort of admired him. I reckon I was just a little bit jealous of him, in a way, because he had better manners than me, and he was better-looking and better dressed. And then he had the kind of a nerve that I knew I didn't have. Not a fightin' nerve—I had that—but the kind of nerve that a real aristocrat always has—a kind o' nerve that gives a man the ability to shut himself up right in the middle of a crowd that he don't like, and act like as if he was alone in his own room, doing just as he pleased.

So when this fellow Stengel turned away from me like that and didn't say nothing, I went mad all over, just like somebody had lit a quick fire in me. My first idea was to haul off and paste him, but I didn't do that. I wanted to do something that was just as cool and insulting as the way he'd looked at me and said nothing.

I held myself in the best I could, an' tried to keep my face natural an' my voice down. I touched him very gentle on the elbow, and I said to him, just as quiet as I could talk, although my voice was shaking a little in spite of all I could do, I said:

"I reckon you didn't hear me when I apologized to you a minute ago. A fellow kind o' shoved me against you and made me spill your liquor. I explained the matter to you and asked you to excuse me."

"The liquor is spilled," he says, in a tone o' voice that made me want to tear him apart and throw away the pieces before anybody got a chance to put him together again. "I heard your explanation, and I didn't choose to question it. Having the liquor spilled was an annoyance against which I made no protest. Your attempt to start a conversation is a second and greater annoyance."

I didn't grab him so gentle when he turned away again, but still I tried to hold myself down.

"I've apologized to you," I says, keeping my voice as low as I could. "Will you accept it, or won't you?"

"Since you ask me in that manner," he says, "no, I won't!"

I was blazing by this time.

"Have you got a gun on you?" I says to him.

He just laughed at me.

"No," he says. "I haven't got a gun, and I wouldn't know what to do with one if I did have it. I have never used what you people out here call a gun. I'm reasonably handy with a rifle or a shotgun, but I've never fired off a revolver. Are you one o' these bad men that they talk about so much out here?"

"No, I'm not!" I shouted at him. I was so mad by then that the whole place was swimming around in front o' my eyes, as if I was dizzy. "I'm not a bad man," I says; "but I'm a man, and I think that's more'n you are!"

I took out one o' my guns and handed it to him, butt end to.

"There you are, young fellow," I says to him. "You're just as well fixed as I am now. Let's see whether you still feel like insulting me!"

He didn't take the gun. He just looked at me and laughed. Then he saw my star, and he laughed harder.

"Are you an officer o' the *peace*?" he asked.

"Never you mind what I am!" I says, getting more and more ashamed o' myself, and madder on account of it, all the time. "I'm a man, and I can prove it. If you're a man, you take this gun I'm givin' you and prove it too!"

"I don't want the gun," he says. "I wouldn't shoot you if I had it in my hand and knew how to use it. I wouldn't shoot any man over a trivial barroom incident."

"You're a dirty coward!" I shouted at him.

I could 'a' bit my tongue off the next minute for saying it. I knew it wasn't so, and I knew he despised me for saying it was.

"You're a disgrace to the star you wear," he says to me, not raising his voice. "If you'll come outside with me, and get away from this crowd that's gathering around here, I'll be glad to go with you to some private place and give you the satisfaction of a boxing lesson. Do you bold, bad men out here in the West ever fight with your fists?"

"Come ahead!" I says to him, trying not to say what I was saying. "If you're too big a coward to take a gun and fight like a man, I'll go out and take it out o' you bare-handed!"

"That's nice of you," he says, mocking me. "Let's get away from the crowd."

II

THERE was a full moon—it was near as bright as day—so we dodged around until we lost the crowd, and then we went out on the prairie outside o' town a way and went to it.

I knew a lot o' rough and tumble tricks, but young Stengel could box. I went for him, and the very first shot he stuck his left in my face and broke my nose.

"Don't come in at me swinging like that," he says, stepping back as cool as if he was really giving me a free boxing lesson. "Keep your left hand up. When you hit, hit from the shoulder. Hit straight."

I yelled something or other at him and went for him again. Again he caught me with his left, this time flush on the mouth. I remember two teeth rattling around loose in my throat, and then for a while I don't remember much of anything.

I was young and strong and willing. I kept tearing into him, crazy mad, and he kept slamming me back and making a general raw hash out o' my face. Finally I got hold o' him, and then things went better for me for a while. My head begun to clear, and the next thing about the fight I really remember we was rastling around on the ground, which was more to my style o' scrapping, and I was doing better.

He broke loose and rolled away from me after a while, and got up. I got up too, and rushed him. I rushed him head down, like a crazy bull, just swinging my hands in his general direction. He stepped in and hit me flush on the jaw, and out I went.

When I come to, he was holding my head in his lap and wiping my face. I got up and started for him again.

"You've had enough," he says to me, backing away.

"Fight!" I says to him. "You dirty coward, fight!"

"All right, sir!" he come back at me, and he stepped in and hit me again.

I don't know how long I was out this time, but when I come to he was wiping my face again and trying to talk some sense into me. Again I got up and went for him.

I just barely got up, and that was all. I could just lift my hands, and I could hardly stand, but I lurched in toward him and I says:

"Fight!"

"I don't want to hit you again," he says.

"Fight, you dirty coward!" I says to him again.

I fell in against him, and he held me up. He held me in his arms and patted me on the back.

"My God!" he says. "Old man, you've had enough. I can't hit you again. I can't do it. I'm sorry I didn't accept your apology when you made it. I was blue and homesick when you came in to-night, and mad at the whole world. If it will do you any good now, I apologize humbly for having been a surly boor."

Well, sir, you know I ain't really what you might say cried but once since I was a little shaver around about ten or twelve years old; and that once was there in Stengel's arms. I wasn't crying because the features on my face was mostly out of place. Looking back on it now, I reckon I was just crying with relief because I had a chance to open up to the fellow at last and tell him how sorry I was I got so rotten mad and made such a fool o' myself.

So I told him all this, between crying and bleeding, and not being able to talk very good with some o' my teeth missing and my lips swollen up till they was like a couple o' bologna sausages. He kept holding me tight in his arms and patting me on the back and telling me it was all right, just as I wanted him to.

And then he told me how ungodly lonesome he was down there, not being used to that kind of a place and the kind o' people there was around there. The upshot of it all was that me and him went and bought ourselves a little shack, and throwed in together to pay for an old grandpappy prospector that was all bent up with rheumatism to do our cooking, and we started baching together.

III

AFTER about a year, Stengel went south of here some eighty miles and went into cattle, and I was appointed marshal. I managed to hold down my job pretty well, and Stengel got big in the cattle business, and branched out, and finally opened up a bank here in town.

And then Stengel went back to Boston on a visit, and come on back here with a wife—an awful nice lady she was. He settled down and begun to get a gray hair here and there in his head, and a lot more inches

about the middle. By and by, about four years after they was married, they had a son, and they named him John.

Well, sir, when this boy was born to Mrs. Stengel, his daddy come around to my office. I seen by the look o' him that he just wanted to sit and talk; so I locked the door, and him and me set there from about four o'clock one afternoon till about two or three o'clock next morning, him talking and me listening, and the talk was 'most all about this boy.

Old Alvin got started in telling me about how he felt when he first pulled up stakes from Boston and come West. He tells me about how the first of his people that come to this country, they come away early in that old Mayflower shipload o' folks that ducked out from England to get a chance to think what they darn pleased. He tells me that when he growed up enough to go to college he had the feeling in him that he belonged to be a pioneer, same way some folks is born longing to be actors, or painters, or fiddlers, or this and that.

Now he was figuring on this boy coming along just in time to take up his daddy's work. My, but he did plan big on that boy! Alvin Stengel was beginning to branch out about that time, and his talk was about cattle in a big way, and farming, and mines, and railroads. The boy was to take things over young, and swing 'em big.

Yes, sir—he planned big; but the one thing he didn't plan on was dying before the boy grew up.

Young John was around eleven years old when the old man had a heart attack and went out quick. He went quick, and I reckon, so far as his plans about business was concerned, he couldn't have picked a worse time to go. He was all spread out over the map, trying to grab this and that to put into young John's hands when he was old enough to hold 'em. If he'd lived, I reckon he'd 'a' pulled it all off; but after he died, there wasn't nobody fit to take charge and finish what he'd begun, and his affairs got all snarled up. When they was untangled again, young John and his maw had a home and a small income left, and that was all.

The youngster was somewhere around thirteen, I reckon, when I first started to hear talk o' him. I didn't pay no attention to it at first. There's always a lot o' loose conversation about a boy in a small town, and it was awful easy for a boy, or any-

body else, to get himself talked about down our way.

As a town and a people, we'd been really wild when we was young, and we just naturally had a relapse. For a while there—oh, ten or twelve years I reckon it was—we got so blamed moral we was a bother to ourselves. Where once we used to frown at a man who killed a fellow or two in a fair fight, it got so's we figured that a boy who smoked cigarettes, or took a girl out driving without having her maw along, was just naturally perdition bound.

We got to be a State 'stead of a Territory in the meantime; and one way and another, being marshal and then sheriff and so on, I had charge o' keeping the town in order, both when she was wild and after she got almost too tame to be comfortable. I ain't defending the wild times. They was bad, and I reckon it's better to be too good than it is not to be good enough—better for the common run of us, anyhow.

But I hadn't forgot the wild times, and I hadn't forgot that there was more or less wild men in them days that was pretty good citizens; so when I started hearing talk about young John Stengel, I just kind o' smiled to myself. I thought the young fellow had inherited old Alvin's energy, and was just beginning to flap his wings and crow a little bit in a way that wouldn't excite nobody that had any understanding of red-blooded folks.

His maw come to me and talked to me about it. She told me he was a little unruly. She said he smoked cigarettes and stayed out late nights, and that she thought, one time when he come in, that she smelled beer on his breath.

I consoled her along the best I could. I recalled it to her mind that there was more than a number of the good men in town that one time or another had stayed out after sunset and come in smelling of beer and cigarettes, at the very least. I told her I didn't think she'd got to worry too much, and jollied her up a lot; and she went home feeling better.

IV

WHEN young John come along between fifteen and sixteen, I begun to worry myself. There was a bad crowd coming up in our town—a crowd along about his age, or maybe a little older—and he was running with 'em.

They weren't the kind of a bad crowd

I'd been used to in the old days. These young fellows that were misbehaving were mostly sons of people that amounted to something. They were sons of men who'd been young in the town when the town was raw and wide open, sons of men who'd stayed sober to work when it was awful easy to get drunk; of men who'd built up decent reputations in a time and place where it didn't seem to make much difference whether a man had a decent reputation or not.

Somehow these young fellows, surrounded by more or less good influences and all the like of that, were growing up very ornery. There weren't any bad killings, or anything like that; but they were racing around road houses and getting drunk pretty often in a mean, hidden sort of a way—getting drunk and gambling a lot. The automobiles was just coming into general use then, and they was racing here and there in 'em every night.

One night, when young John was about seventeen years old, he was driving around—drunk, I guess. Coming in south of town, about ten miles out, he smashed into old man Smithers on his way home in his big farm wagon, killed one of the horses, broke the old man's leg, and shook himself up pretty bad. There was some scandal about that, but no lawing. The thing was hushed up before it got into the courts.

Mrs. Stengel come to me again, and asked me if I wouldn't talk to John in the name of his father, and see if I couldn't do something for him; so I had the boy up to the office, and had a little powwow with him. He was a handsome youngster, and looked a lot like his father, but more sullen like. Somehow he reminded me a lot of Stengel the night I first spoke to the old man, when I spilled the whisky on his vest, and we had the fight; only the boy was sullen and mean-looking all the time, the way the old man had been that one night in a fit of the blues.

"John," I says to him, "your old daddy thought an awful lot of you. After you was born, he just done everything with the one idea that he was going to make life right for you. If he was still here, he'd be awful disappointed about the way you're going on. Don't you think it 'd be a good idea for you to kind o' straighten up just a little, and travel along about the gait that 'd make the old man's eyes shine with pride if he was here to watch you?"

Young John sneered and scowled at me. "I know what it's all about," he says. "My mother's put you on to talk to me. Now you look here!" he says to me. "You can't preach to me, and neither can anybody else. I'm not doing anything very bad," he says. "If I want to take a little drink once in a while, that's my business. I'm all right, and if a lot of you old busybodies would stop worrying about me, I guess there wouldn't be any trouble."

"Well, son," I says to him, "so far as I know, you haven't done anything yet that would worry me if I was your daddy; but, John," I says to him, "you're travelin' with the wrong crowd. It ain't exactly a bad crowd yet, but it's going to be. Some of that crowd is going to break away and be all right. I hope that you'll be one of those that do break away. But I'm sheriff of this county, John, and I know, just as well as I know that the sun's going to rise to-morrow morning, that in that crowd you're fooling around with there's the makings of the gang that I'm going to have trouble with some time in the next four or five years."

Say! That young wild cat flamed up at me like as if I'd spoke some deadly insult about his whole family. He gets up and bangs on my desk with his fist, and he says, says he:

"My crowd's all right, an' you can't say anything about 'em! They're better than a lot of you snooping old busybodies that are always trying to make trouble for us. I'll tell you this, too," he says to me. "If you have any trouble any time with any of my crowd, they'll make you think that the old days when this was a cow town was just stage play. We're not looking for any trouble from you or anybody else; but if you want trouble, you just tackle my crowd, and you'll get it. We'll fix you or anybody else that bothers us. We're 'tending to our business, and if you know what's good for your health you'll 'tend to yours!"

And with that he goes raring out.

V

WELL, sir, by the time the young fellow was twenty-four, he was the talk of the town, sure enough. He'd been fired out of college twice, and he was getting to be just a worthless, no-account bum.

It was along about that time, too, that I found out he was carrying on, more or less, with my sister's kid, Nina Weaver.

Man alive! How true it is that the shoemaker's children go barefooted and the milliner's daughter never has a new hat! Here I was sheriff of the county, keeping my eye open—and that open eye pretty busy all the time watching young John Stengel and the bad young crowd he was trailing with—and, by Jingo, this affair of his with my niece had growed into a full-sized love business before I ever even knowed anything about it.

They was all fixed up to elope. When I got the news, I stopped that, of course; and then I had a talk with Nina about it.

My Lordy me! Why do any of us old people ever waste our time talking to the young folks? It never does any good. Nina, she didn't listen to a word I had to say. She cried and stormed and pleaded, and stuck by it that she was going to marry young John Stengel some day, no matter what anybody did.

I seen she meant it, and that kind o' put me in a hole, because she was an awful fine, sweet little girl, and one of these kind that don't get over marrying the wrong man. She was just plumb set that no matter what John Stengel was or had been, he'd be a fine husband if she married him; that he'd turn right around overnight into a hard-working, sober fellow who'd settle down and make a home with her.

I knew perfectly well that John Stengel wouldn't do any such thing—not just because he got married to my niece he wouldn't. I knew, too, knowing my niece, that if she didn't marry the young scoundrel, she'd contrive somehow to make some kind of a tragedy out of her life; so you see I was up a stump.

My sister fixed things for a little while by taking Nina over to Europe that summer; but I knew plumb well that the girl wasn't going to be cured when she got back. She wasn't that kind.

She'd been gone about three months when Jasper Hedges's little girl, Nelly, was found killed alongside the creek out by Tolliver's bridge. They nabbed a young Swede tramp, by the name of Axel Hansen, as the fellow who'd probably done it. This young fellow Hansen couldn't talk more'n about six words of English, so I called in Whitey Childberg to talk to the boy and tell me what he said.

The tramp claimed he'd been over to Thomaston when he was supposed to have been seen out by the bridge where the girl

was found murdered, and that how he come to be in town as soon as he was, he got a ride in an automobile with a fellow on the way over—a fellow that drove right fast. He didn't know the fellow's name, but he described him the best he could, and as near as I could figure it out it was John Stengel.

I knew I had to work pretty fast, because the lynching spirit was awful strong right then, and everybody was certain that the young Swede tramp was guilty. I got Stengel to come up to the county jail to take a look at the prisoner, and he identified him right off. Not to go into the details of the girl's murder, which ain't pretty, the identification absolutely let the Swede out as a suspect.

"Now, John," I says to young Stengel, "listen here. You know—and, since you've told me this boy was with you, I know—that he's not guilty."

"Why, sure," he says. "They've got him all wrong."

"All right!" I says to him. "Now, John, I know further, and you know, that your gang, the crowd you run with, are out right this minute framing a lynching party."

He got a little bit red.

"Well," he says, "I know that, too. As far as that goes, I've been out helping 'em frame it. We were pretty dead sure that this fellow in here was the guy that done it, and we were going to take care of him quick."

"Well, we'll pass that, John," I says; "but now that you know he's not the one who did it, you just go out and call your crowd off, will you?"

"Why, sure," he says. "Certainly I will. You don't think I'd let an innocent man get lynched, do you?"

"No, John," I says. "I'm sure you wouldn't do that. Now you go on out and spread this news. Maybe they'll believe you quicker 'n they would me. As soon as you've got it all fixed, come back and let me know it's all right, will you?"

"Why, sure," he says.

He went out then, and I sat down and waited for just what I knew was going to happen.

There was I with an innocent prisoner and a terrible bad night coming up, and maybe a jam where I'd either have to shoot real bullets into pretty good people from my own town, or get shot myself by men that was good friends of mine when they

was sane. There I was with a mess like that on my hands, and I was as happy as a man can be, because I knew something. Oh, indeedy I did! I hadn't been an officer of the law all that time in a changing country without knowing what I knew.

About a half an hour after John went out, he come back. His face was white, and he was shaking a little.

"Say, sheriff," he said to me in kind of a trembling voice, "these people are crazy! They won't believe me!"

"They won't believe you, John?" I says to him, acting surprised. "They won't believe that this fellow was with you in your machine when the murder took place?"

"No," he says. "They won't listen to me. They act like a lot of crazy people!"

I knew who he'd talked to—the leaders of his crowd. I knew that they were the ones who were getting ready to head the lynching party. I'd been through these lynching things before, and I knew just how much chance any man had of telling the truth to a lot of cowards that had once gone blood mad with the idea that they was going to lynch some poor devil.

"Well, John," I says to him, "we've got to get this boy away somehow."

"My God, yes!" he says. "They'll get him, sheriff, sure, if you don't get him away. Why, they're crazy! You can't do anything with 'em!"

"I know you can't, John," I says. "Now listen, son," I says. "I've got a plan, and if you'll help me out with it, I think we can put it over."

"Why, sure!" he says. "It would be terrible to hang this poor dumb tramp who didn't have any more to do with killing Nelly Hedges than I did. What—what are you goin' to do?"

"Well, I reckon I better swear you in as a deputy before we get started."

"Sure," says John. "That's all right."

So I swore him in, and then I made my plans with him.

VI

ALONG a little before dark the mob was beginning to gather around the county jail. There wasn't a ghost of a chance of our getting the young Swede out. Some of the city police came into the jail, and after they'd been there for a few minutes I went out with three of 'em, and we walked across the lawn to the courthouse. We all come out with our guns drawn.

"Now, gentlemen, stand back!" I says to the crowd, waving my gun around. "I know you're in an ugly temper, and I'm not taking any chances with you. Stay well back! Anybody that comes near us is committing suicide, because we're prepared to shoot!"

Well, sir, they seen we didn't have the Swede along with us, and so they done nothing but growl and mutter about what they was going to do a little later. We went on over into the courthouse and stayed there about two minutes. Then we came back to the jail again just the same way, me and the three city policemen all carrying our guns, and me making the same little speech to the crowd about keeping back or we'd shoot. The crowd wondered what me and the three cops went to the courthouse and back for, as I'd meant they should wonder.

We went on into the jail and stayed there about five minutes. During that five minutes this Swede tramp put on the uniform of one of the cops that had gone with me over to the courthouse the first time. He was about the tramp's size, this cop, and the same complexion. With the helmet well jammed down over his head, and the twilight getting a little deeper all the time, I figured the Swede would get by when I repeated the performance of going to the courthouse with what looked like the same three policemen I'd had with me before.

So out we walks right into the teeth of the crowd that was yelling for this fellow, and I made very much the same speech I'd made before.

"Keep back, gentlemen!" I says. "We're prepared to shoot if you crowd us. I know who you want, but you're never going to get him. You'll find me ready back at the jail when it gets dark, and you dirty cowards that are afraid to work in the daylight put on your little party. Keep back, gentlemen! Clear the way! We're prepared to shoot if you crowd!"

It ain't over a hundred and fifty feet across that lawn from the door of the jail, where we come out, to the entrance of the courthouse, where we went in; but that hundred and fifty feet was prob'ly the longest ten thousand miles I ever walked. Every little fraction of the hair of a second I thought somebody might see that the fellow beside me in the cop uniform was not the cop who had walked across there with me a few minutes before. But it was gettin' a

little bit dark, and they had seen all three of these cops plain when we walked over to the courthouse before; and, just as I hoped, nobody ever stopped to think that maybe these three uniformed men weren't all the same men that were with me the other time.

The mob milled around the entrance of the courthouse, waiting for us to come out again, trying to get up courage to make an attack on us then, and to storm the jail later. While they waited there, me and this Swede skipped through the courthouse.

On the way, he shed the policeman's coat and helmet and put on a cap. I took off my big-brimmed hat and put on a cap, too. We went to the other side of the courthouse, down in the basement, and out through a narrow alley. On the sidewalk, right where we came out, was John Stengel, sitting in his automobile with the engine running.

The Swede skipped across the sidewalk and into the car. I kept an eye open and followed him a minute later. We swung down the street and around the corner, and I thought we was all loose; but just then I heard a yell that seemed to come right down out of the sky.

I looked up, and I seen Robby Fandorf, a young fellow around town, one of the crowd that John had been running with, sitting up there on the crosspiece of a telephone pole, where he'd been posted for a lookout. From the way he yelled, I knew that he was on to the play.

John looked up and saw him, too. He swore and stepped on the gas, and away we went out on the prairie into the growing dark. We could hear 'em yelling and whooping behind us, and we knew they'd soon be out on all roads looking for us. I'd telephoned to Freedsville, asking 'em to send machines and men down the road, at least as far as the county line, to meet us; so I knew that if we could make ten miles without being caught, we'd most likely get free.

We done just about ten miles when the rear axle in John's machine busted, and there we sat in the road, plumb helpless. We hadn't been sitting there thirty seconds when the sheriff and his men from Freedsville showed, running like sensible people in machines without headlights. We whipped the Swede over into one of their cars.

Just as we was backing around to start for Freedsville, we seen the headlights of a machine about a mile and a half back, com-

ing hell bent. I got into the car with the boys from Freedsville that had the Swede with 'em, and I says to John:

"You don't mind my going on, do you, John?"

"No, sure not," he says. "Go ahead!"

"You think you'll be all right?" I says to him.

"Why, certainly," he says, laughing at me. "They won't bother me. Most likely the boys in that machine coming up are some of the fellows in my own crowd."

"All right, John," I says. "Thanks for the help!"

He says good-by, and we speeded up. When we'd gone about three hundred yards, and I knew we was out of sight in the dark, I had 'em pull up the car. I jumped out, and told 'em to go ahead. They went streaking on to safety with the Swede.

I sneaked over the fence into the field, and hustled back toward where I could see and hear without being seen or heard. Just about then this machine that was chasing us come shooting up and stopped. Five young fellows, all of 'em pals of John, all of 'em members of the ornery crowd that he'd been trailing with for so long, piled out and surrounded the boy.

They babbled so loud and so fast that you couldn't hear what anybody said for a minute. Then John backs off a little, and raises his hand, and yells real loud.

"Now listen to me!" he says. "I know this fellow is innocent. You fellows were all crazy this afternoon when I tried to tell you, but you might just as well listen now, because you're not going to get him anyhow. He's halfway to Freedsville by this time, and you—"

That was as far as he got.

"Freedsville, hey?" one of the gang yelled, and made a dive for the car. "Come on, fellows!" he says. "They've took him on down this road toward Freedsville. Come on! We'll get you later," he says to John. "We'll get you later, you double-crossing crook!"

They all piled back into the machine, yelling at John and threatening him, and he trying to talk sense to 'em.

VII

ALL of a sudden John steps back a little to one side of the road.

"Hands up, you fellows!" he yells out. "I got a gun here, and I'm going to use it if you start that car!"

"What's eating you?" the fellow that was driving the car howls back at him.

"Never mind that!" John says. "Sheriff Dorgan swore me in as deputy, and it's my business to see that you boys don't go another step along this road to-night. That's my business, and I'll stick to it!"

And then they begun on him. They cursed him and they threatened him. They tried pleading with him, but the boy was rock-bound. They couldn't talk him out of it, any more than I could talk him out of keeping on with his rotten crowd when I'd tried it years before.

John Stengel was sworn in as deputy sheriff to uphold the law and protect the life of a man that he knew was innocent. John Stengel wouldn't go back on doing his duty as an officer of the peace any more than he'd go back on that crowd of his when he was one of 'em and I tried to pry him loose from 'em. No, sirree!

He was just the same John Stengel he'd always been, but fate had fixed the play for me so I'd been able to get him to change sides. I just kneeled there in the grass and hugged my sides, and kept wiping my eyes and watching. You could see him standing there plain in the light from the headlights. I was just praying for that rotten bunch to keep right on working on John, because the harder they worked on him, the more solid he was on the right side.

While they was arguing with him, they got out of the car and crowded around him. John was so busy talking back that he didn't notice how close they was getting. I seen two of 'em close in on him quick at the same time, and a minute later I heard one of 'em yell:

"All right, I got his gun!"

Then there was a lot of swearing, grunting, thumping, and cursing there in the ditch alongside the road, where the headlights didn't throw any light. I knew they was beating the boy to a frazzle, but I was just hoping down in my old heart that they wouldn't kill him. I was hoping it, but I wouldn't move to stop it.

I worked so hard to keep myself from doing what every nerve and muscle in me wanted to do—jump down in there with my gun and wipe that cowardly gang out—that I was sore all over for a week, like somebody had beat me; but I just kneeled there in the grass, in the dark, and let them have their way with the boy. It was kill or cure, and I had my niece and her life to think of.

By and by they quit yelling and cursing, and was awful quiet for a minute or so. Then I heard one of 'em say, in a kind of whisper:

"Gee! Do you think he's bad hurt?"

"I don't know," another one says, kind o' whispering, too. "Light a match, and let's have a look at him."

I seen the flash of a match for just a few seconds. Then it went out, and I heard one of 'em say:

"My God! Do you think he's dead?"

"Listen!" says another. "Let's get out of this quick. All we got to do is to keep our mouths shut, and nobody 'll ever know who pulled this. He was here all alone. All we got to do is to get away, and who's going to know anything?"

So the dirty cowards piled in their machine and went scuttling back to town.

VIII

THE minute they was gone, I crawled over the fence and put my flash light on John Stengel. I don't wonder the dogs who did that job lit a match and ran when they saw him. I eased him up the best I could, and in a few minutes some more machines come down the road from Freedsville. I put him in one of 'em, and took him to the hospital there.

Young John was just getting able to see out of his eyes and know that he was still alive when my sister and Nina showed up. I didn't give 'em any useless information when they got here. I met 'em at the train with the car and took 'em on over to Freedsville; and on the way over I says to my sister:

"Jenny," I says to her, "you come to me once and asked me to fix this thing between John Stengel and Nina. Do you remember that?"

"Yes," she says, "I certainly do."

"Well," I says to her, "I fixed it."

So I took 'em to the hospital, and I sent Nina on up to John's room, and I took my sister back out in the machine. We rode around and had a couple of very bad hours, me and her; but she had a good deal of sense. Besides, she couldn't help herself nohow, because the damage was done. She was mighty rough on me, though.

"If my daughter's life is ruined," she says to me, "I'm goin' to hold you responsible for it."

"Your child's life ain't going to be ruined by John Stengel, Jenny," I says to her.

"John is a good-hearted, stubborn boy. There ain't never been anything rightly the matter with him. The whole trouble's been that he was a good soldier fighting with the wrong army; and now he's switched sides. It took an awful thing to switch him, because, as I told you before, he's a stubborn boy; but it's going to take something worse than that to switch him back now."

You know that woman, that sister of mine? She never did own up that I was right, even after John and Nina had been married for seven years, and had three of

the nicest kids you ever laid your eyes on, and was living just as happy as a couple of lovesick turtle doves. No, sir—she wouldn't own up to it then.

When John went over to France in the war as a captain, and come back a colonel with enough medals to make a strong man lopsided wearing 'em, she wouldn't own up to it even then—I swear she wouldn't! It wasn't until after they struck oil on John's land, and he went and made himself near a million dollars, that that woman would own up that it was all right.

A Borrowed Romance

WHEREIN A SPINSTER GLOWS IN THE REFLECTED GLORY OF
YOUTH AND LOVE

By Lillian Fryer Rainey

IT was nearly one o'clock, and the men who had gone home for dinner were hurrying back to town. There was no such thing in Maryville as leaving for business in the morning and not returning home until night. Dinner, with boiled vegetables, hot bread, and pie, was served at twelve o'clock sharp.

"Turning a little colder, I guess," Maggie murmured, as she watched them hurrying by with turned up collars. "Everybody's been to dinner now except Carter Morrison."

One of the clearing houses for gossip in Maryville was Maggie Doty's dressmaking parlor. The fact that destiny had dealt Maggie Doty such a skimpy hand accounted, perhaps, for her keen interest in the way other people played theirs. There were those who thought she told all she knew, but that was because they didn't know how much she knew. The black eyes that sometimes twinkled, and sometimes snapped or stabbed as sharply as her needle, gave no hint of the poetic something which, born without speech, found expression in the graduation dresses, the shrouds, the trousseaus, and the prayer meeting second bests that she turned out year after year.

If she had lived in a city, she might have been called "*madame*" instead of "Miss Mag"—that is, if she had consented to do away with the tight, screwed up psyche that adorned the back of her head, and sometimes served as a hook for the tape measure.

From the porch she brought a blackjack log and put it into the heater. With the settling of the lid there came a short rap on the door.

"Come in!"

And into the parlor, a little breathless and very much excited, danced two of Maryville's sub-debs.

"Now please don't say no, Miss Mag! Of course, you've piles of things in that skirt box to be made, but they're not really important like this!"

With a snip of the scissors Peggy Tomlinson cut the string, and from the newspaper wrapper dropped a yellowing silk and a beaded blue plush.

"The blue plush is for me, and the silk is Priscilla's mother's wedding dress. We are invited to the fancy dress party out at Imogene Jackson's, and Priscilla and I want you to fix these over in some perfectly stunning way for us."

For the fraction of a minute Maggie Doty hesitated.

"I might do it at night." She pursed her lips into a silent whistle as she shook out the folds of the ancient garments. "It's a wonder they ain't moth-eaten. Lavender!" she added, sniffing the delicate fragrance that they gave out.

"Mother has never worn it again," Priscilla remarked absently, as she stroked the billows of silk. "If you could fix it for me, Miss Mag, it would be lovely for the party!"

"Mother said you could just go ahead and whack into this blue plush any way you liked," Peggy broke in. "She's really too fat now ever to wear plush again. Besides, it's all there is that can be made over, and I simply wouldn't miss a party out at the Jacksons' for worlds!"

"Out at the Jacksons'" was a term that had for a quarter of a century held for Mag the charm of the unattainable. In other years it had required a young man sufficiently interested to hire a horse and buggy to drive out for two miles, and no such young man had ever emerged from the background.

With a practiced eye she took in the varying widths and gores.

"I think I can manage it. I can't tell you exactly the way they'll be; it kind of grows on me while I'm making them. I'll be thinking them over to-day, while I finish this gray silk for Mrs. Lester; but I'll take your measure now. Going to be a—turn to the right, Peg—going to be a big party? All of Imogene's crowd would be invited, I reckon."

"I think so. I saw the list. Benny Dawson had it for the boys to mark off the names, you know," Peggy confided, as she turned carefully for the skirt length.

"Kind of expensive for the boys whose fathers haven't got an auto. Must cost a good deal to hire a car to take you and bring you back."

"Perhaps that's the reason, Miss Mag, the boys are slow about making their dates." Peggy giggled, and then stopped, as she saw the deepening color in Priscilla's cheeks. "There's plenty of time—it's five days yet," she added hurriedly.

"Then I'll go ahead and make a dress or two, and finish you girls up at the last. I'll measure you now, Priscilla."

Maggie turned to the shy, rather quaint girl who had lived all her eighteen years in

Maryville, and yet had never seemed quite a part of it.

"Hold out your arm," she commanded. "I'll probably make yours with short puff sleeves. With your shoulders and arms, Priscilla, puff sleeves and a low neck would be the very thing. I've already got you fixed in my mind as a sort of belle of Baltimore. You don't see silk like this any more," she went on, rubbing a bit of it gently between finger and thumb. "The kind I make up now would never be satisfied to stay put away in lavender for twenty years. It would go all to pieces with such a quiet life."

"I don't blame it," Peggy grinned. "I should think, if a dress could have feelings, it would rather be torn to shreds at a dance than sleep for years in a smelly old box!"

"Oh, but this was a particular dress, Peg," Priscilla interrupted quite seriously. "A wedding dress should feel like—like a king for a day, or a prince for a night, or something like that, you know. It should think that it had had its one big hour, and after that nothing else could matter."

"Well, Priscilla, my dear, for a girl who doesn't even *like* boys, I should say that's about the dippiest sentiment I ever heard!"

Maggie looked thoughtfully at the wistful face of the girl whom people called old-fashioned, and wondered.

"No danger of your ever having any clothes to put away, Peggy, not if you go through 'em like you have this year." Maggie sidetracked the conversation through a kindly instinct which she did not stop to define. "Now let's see—this is Tuesday. Both of you come late Thursday evening, and I'll have them ready to fit."

II

It was a short afternoon. Darkness came with a flurry of snow, and at five o'clock Maggie Doty put away her work and went into the little kitchen to prepare her simple supper. After she had dried the dishes and put them neatly away, she brought in enough logs to keep the fire going, and some kindling to start it in the morning. From the black walnut bookcase in the ice-cold parlor she took down a worn edition of "Ivanhoe," and until the hour hand of the old clock pointed to ten she enjoyed vicariously adventures of which Maryville had no inkling.

There were no preliminaries to what followed—none at all. Against the glass door

leading to the side porch something fell into the deadening snow with a soft thud. Maggie jerked up the shade and peered cautiously out through the frosted glass.

"My goodness!" she gasped. "It's a man!"

The tone of her voice indicated that it might as well have been a crocodile. With rare discretion she took, from behind the top row of books, a pistol. Holding it at arm's length, she tiptoed to the door and turned the key.

"Get!" she cried, quite in the voice of one saying "Scat!" to a stray feline.

"Goin' to in a minute. Shust rest lil while."

"Carter Morrison!" Even in the shock of the first surprise, caution, born of a small town, muted Maggie's cry. "Carter, you're drunk!"

Without waiting for a reply, she reëntered the house, and, going to a small closet, put on her rubbers and a long coat. The boy on the porch had stumbled to his feet and was leaning heavily against the railing when she returned.

"Goin' somewhere, Miss Mag?" he inquired, laughing vacantly.

"Now listen to me, Carter!" There was a scissorlike edge to her tone that penetrated the fog in his fuddled brain. "You're drunk, and it's the first time, or I'd known about it. Now I could phone Jake Perry, and he'd put you in the lockup, and every tongue in Maryville would be wagging; but I'm going to take you home myself, if I have to ride you the whole distance in a wheelbarrow!"

"Tha's right—a wheelbarrow, Miss Mag. Ride me in a wheelbarrow!"

"Now, Carter, you can walk if you'll try. Hold on to my shoulder."

"Not a step—won't walk a step. Got to ride in lil old wheelbarrow!"

In desperation she groped through the darkness to the wood house, unearthed a somewhat rickety barrow, and wheeled it to the side porch.

"Get in. I don't know that we'll ever make that hundred and fifty feet. I'm thankful there's a sidewalk!"

With infinite caution she opened the Morrison front door. The reassuring snores of the old judge effectually drowned any noise made in getting Carter into his room. Then she softly effected her retreat. It was still snowing, and the flying flakes soon hid the trail of the barrow.

There are tragedies so unobtrusive that nobody dreams they are tragedies, not even those who are living them.

III

WHEN spring came tripping back each year, breathing life into the yellow honeysuckle swaying down the picket fence at the back of the garden, and the fragrant, poignant sweetness came floating in on the evening breeze, Maggie Doty shut the window with a bang and took a spoonful of sulphur and molasses.

There was no sad, sweet memory, no wild stir of happiness, no thrilling emotion linked with honeysuckle and Maggie—there never had been. When the summer moon bloomed white, and the strolling serenaders who passed, but never stopped, hummed the haunting strains of "Juanita" or the lilting refrain of "Good Night, Ladies," she stuffed her fingers in her ears and cried into the pillow.

People had long since ceased to wonder why Maggie Doty had never had a beau; but there still were times when the thought came to Maggie.

With the passing years she had turned more often to warm at the fires of others' happiness; but to-night, as she bathed her feet in hot water against the chill of the snow, rubbed her joints with arnica, and put her front hair up in curl papers, her imagination, usually so earth-bound, soared away on the wings of romance to scout along the windings of destiny.

The next morning there was no fatigue, only the afterglow of a real adventure, which Maggie took out mentally and viewed from various angles. The very fact that she could never tell it enriched it as an heirloom.

Maryville was snow-bound, but Maggie did not miss the usual quota of casual visitors. In the afternoon she baked ginger cookies like those with which she had filled Carter's pockets when he was a little boy. Although it may have been the thoughts of a long-ago Carter that incited the ginger cookies, it was fat little Buddy Graham, bearing a note, who arrived just in time to help put them away—only they didn't all go into the brown stone jar.

After he had gone, Maggie reread the note, moved over to the window, and continued placidly to rip up the yellowing silk, quite indifferent to certain explicit instructions received.

Napoleon had nothing on Maggie Doty when it came to quick decisions. She had outlined her campaign when Carter came out of the adjacent front door on his way to town. She timed the opening of her own door accurately with his arrival at the intersection of her sidewalk.

"Carter, I want to see you."

"I'm late this morning, Miss Mag. I'll stop later in the day."

"Carter, you come in now," she insisted. There was no sharpness in the tone, but the patient determination that annihilates objection.

Maggie led the way into the little sewing room.

"Sit down," she said.

Carter sat down, and drew a long breath. He flushed, but looked steadily into her eyes.

"Shoot, Miss Mag!"

"Are you in love with any girl, Carter?" Maggie began.

Carter stared his amazement. He had expected a lecture on the evils of the raisins and yeast that cheer but also inebriate.

"Absolutely not."

"Then that settles it. That was the only thing that bothered me. Are you going to the party at Imogene Jackson's?"

"I haven't decided."

"Then decide now. I want you to take Priscilla Graham."

"Holy Moses! Why Priscilla? And why pick on me, Miss Mag?"

"Well, there are several reasons why I've picked on you." Maggie squinted as she threaded a needle. "You're good-looking, and most of the girls are glad to tell it when you take them anywhere. I've noticed that when you put on spring clothes and rush a visiting girl, the other boys put on the same kind of clothes and try to get in a few dates. You're a good boy, too, in spite of something that only you and I know. I've liked you ever since you were five years old and used to sit on my back steps eating ginger cookies."

The threat was so sugar-coated that Carter grinned openly as he caught Maggie's drift.

"You want me to jazz things up a bit for Priscilla, in lieu of which you'll forget a certain indiscretion of mine!"

"And a ride in a wheelbarrow," Mag put in dryly.

"Now I understand your partiality for me, Miss Mag; but why Priscilla?"

For answer she handed him the note that Buddy had brought.

DEAR MISS MAG:

Mother isn't at all well, and I've decided not to go to the party. You need not make over the dress as we had planned.

Sincerely,

PRISCILLA.

"Now, how long, Carter"—Maggie leaned forward in her chair—"how long do you think it would take to cure Priscilla's mother and make Priscilla change her mind, if you should phone her right now and ask her for the pleasure of her company to Imogene's party?"

"For the love of Mike! You seem to have it all settled." There was a note of rebellion. "I don't particularly care for Priscilla Graham, and I don't see the need of hauling her around. She's rather a heavy load, you know."

"So were you, even in a wheelbarrow," Maggie shot back maliciously.

Carter grinned his appreciation.

"All right—there's that," he said.

"But what's wrong with her?" persisted Maggie. "She's prettier than Peg and a lot of the girls, and she's very ladylike."

"Now you've said it!" groaned Carter. "She is ladylike, and she's about as lively as a funeral. I don't know," he hedged ungraciously, "why the boys don't like her. They just don't, and if you get her once you're stuck—that's all. She hasn't any small talk, and who wants to discuss Ruskin and Emerson at a party?"

"Maybe it's because she knows you boys feel that way that she crawls into a shell, and nobody ever coaxes her out. I'd like you to take it on as a"—the words came awkwardly—"as a sporting proposition. I'll furnish the money, and—"

"And I'm to crack the shell! What's the big idea, Miss Mag? Why do you care?"

"I can't just explain it to you, Carter, but I'd very much like to see Priscilla go to the party out at the Jacksons'. I never was there in my life, and in a way it would be like going myself."

Carter flushed suddenly, with a feeling for which he had no name.

"I don't give a whoop about her, Miss Mag; but if you say so, I'll take her on and give her the rush of her sweet young life for four hours—four, but after the fatal stroke of twelve she's not my *Cinderella* any more."

"I want her to have flowers and all the trimmings. I'd like to pay for them myself, Carter."

"Absolutely not! You must think I'm an awful piker. I'll play the game."

"There's one thing you must promise me, too."

"Name it."

"You are not to make love to her."

"Easy enough. I do solemnly swear!" He grinned wickedly. "My cue, I gather, is to make the other fellows do it."

"And, Carter, I want you to let me know how—well, how things go."

There was a faint flush on the sallow cheeks.

"Positively I'll keep you posted, Miss Mag. Got to be toddling on to the bank now."

As he paused to shut the gate, he commented inaudibly:

"Anyway, she'd find out!"

IV

CARTER MORRISON had no intention of appearing suddenly before his friends in company with Priscilla Graham without suitable preparation. On the way to the bank he dropped into the abstract office of one Benny Dawson, the custodian of a document known as "the list."

"Lo, old thing! Still hanging on to that list?"

"Sure—better late than never. Make your mark."

"Got some choice ones left?"

"Quite a few. Some of the boys are kind of slow. The new garage fellow isn't a trusting soul."

"Think I'll try a new one," Carter remarked, as he ran a pencil through the name of Priscilla Graham. "I've had my eye on her for some time."

"Must have a beam in it," Benny suggested solicitously. "Better see an oculist about it."

"Thanks, old top, I think I know what I'm doing. The way to get a perfect peach is to sight it before it's fully ripe. So long! Don't get muddled in your titles."

He caught a faint flicker of amusement on the face of Dr. Chester Conway, who was standing at the door. Carter flushed uncomfortably, for this was the one man in town to whom he paid homage. Conway represented, for Carter, a world beyond his horizon, where one wore a dress suit on occasions other than as best man at a wed-

ding, and where lobster and champagne fitted naturally into one's reminiscences.

"When do you think your perfect peach will ripen, Carter?" Conway drawled lazily, with a fine shading of the condescension of an older man. "I'd like to be at the harvest."

"Entirely agreeable to me, doc. I don't figure on being there myself. I'm only the warming rays of the sun."

"Just a little experiment in sociology, I suppose?"

"Well"—Carter hesitated—"between you and me and nobody else, old man, it does seem a darned shame that she's always left out. I rather thought—"

"I see!" Conway had a queer look in his half shut eyes. "It might be rather interesting."

Carter paused uncertainly. He wanted to caution Conway not to mention anything that had been said, but the words stuck in his throat.

V

By night Priscilla Graham's stock had gone up fifty points. By Friday, Carter had adroitly placed all her dances, except three, which he virtuously gave to himself.

Maggie had evolved from the old wedding dress a quaint costume of silk and tulle that brought out the shy girl's flower-like loveliness. She delayed the hooks and eyes to the eleventh hour, as an excuse to put the last touches on Priscilla herself, to see the bubbling happiness in her eyes, and to wave farewell as she sailed away in Judge Morrison's car.

Like the odor of new-mown hay in the dewy dusk, like the flavor of the first wild strawberry, like the song of the robin in the spring, was that night at the Jacksons' to Priscilla. Carter had done well the thing he had planned to do. She laughed and danced and actually coquetted under his deft management.

"I'm having such a heavenly time!" she confided to him naively, as he guided her through a one-step. "I almost wish tomorrow would never come!"

As Carter looked down into her upturned face, it dawned on him that he hadn't stretched things over far when he had called her a peach—only she was a somewhat different variety, and she still had the fuzz on.

In the days that followed they were everywhere together. Twice a week the express wagon delivered flowers or candy,

and the bubbling happiness in Priscilla's eyes continued to bubble. It bubbled into an adorable surprise at the little attentions that other girls took for granted. There were times when it looked out at Carter with sweet seriousness while he unfolded his philosophy of life and his plans for his future to a girl who could understand.

There was something very absorbing to Carter in all this; but unfortunately, after a time, affairs were snatched rudely out of his capable hands, and he found himself making his dates—if he had any—far ahead. If she wasn't skating on the lake with that young fellow from Nashville, she was making fudge with Peggy Tomlinson, or jazzing with any one of half a dozen gals. If she had ceased to be his *Cinderella*, it was not Carter's fault. It was due to an oversupply of fairy princes.

February with its snow and ice had gone, and there came a wonderful March day that whispered of May. Gypsy teas come early in Tennessee. In kitchens there was an odor of fried chicken, and on front porches pretty girls in starched gingham and floppy hats waited impatiently for the *honk, honk*, of certain cars.

As a yellow roadster with Priscilla and Dr. Conway dashed around the courthouse square, Carter closed the cashier's wicket of the First National with sufficient emphasis to drown an expletive, and called it a day. He had known for a week that she had an engagement with Conway. Having missed out himself by only a few hours, the disappointment still rankled.

Anyhow, he didn't approve of Conway for Priscilla. Hang it all, he was too old for a girl like that—a girl all white and starry and sweet like jasmine!

With a sudden determination to stag it, Carter stowed a five-pound box of chocolates in his car, and, with the soothing sound of his cut-out for company, sped off down the Nashville pike.

When the last deviled egg had been eaten and the cake crumbs and stray spiders shaken to the winds, Carter deliberately broke all the rules of the game, and quietly carried Priscilla off to a lone chestnut tree that sheltered two and no more. Conway gave no sign as he turned away and joined a foursome down by the spring, but his gay laugh rang across the open. He laughed a little too often, thought Carter.

"This is the first time I've talked to you in a week, Priscilla," young Morrison ob-

served rather stiffly, as he spread his handkerchief to protect her pink gingham frock from the bark of the tree.

"So it is. You have been neglecting me shamefully, haven't you, Carter?"

He looked at her suspiciously.

"You know why. It's because I can't even talk to you any more without stepping on half a dozen other people."

"And you are tender-hearted, and don't like to step on them—is that it?"

"Is it?" he echoed.

Priscilla looked toward the spring, and laughed. They both laughed. Carter flushed with victory and thrust his sword into its scabbard.

"Conway's a good sort—in a way," he said with superb condescension, locking his fingers beneath his head and gazing speculatively up at the first dim star.

"Why don't you like Chet, Carter?"

The smile died on Carter's lips.

"Chet! Do you call him Chet?"

"He asked me to."

There was a curious tightness in Carter's throat.

"And I suppose he calls you Priscilla."

"Oh, no!"

"Well, why shouldn't he, if you call him Chet?" he demanded gruffly.

"No—I merely said he asked me to."

"Oh!"

The monosyllable breathed relief. Priscilla smiled in the darkness—a smile that did credit to Carter as a teacher.

"I'm still considering it. Do you think I should?"

His lips tightened and his heel dug viciously into the soft turf.

"Do as you like!"

"I shall," she murmured sweetly. "Naturally it doesn't matter to you."

The starry white jasmine looked very cold and white and frozen in the moonlight, while the smoldering fire in Carter's eyes burned out in the apparently endless silence, leaving only the hurt and bewildered look of a boy.

The damp sweetness of wild fern from the marsh was close about them. Across the hollow came the faint tinkle of a cow bell and the trickle of water over stones. Priscilla's slender white hand lay idly on the grass. With a motion at once fearful and longing, Carter laid his own gently over it. The two hands were trembling like twin leaves.

"It does matter a lot to me," he said

huskily. "You—you're so young and sweet and—good," he added softly.

In the starlight her lashes glistened with tears, and beneath Carter's brown hand her fingers fluttered and timidly clasped his.

"Hi, there, Carter! Carter! Carter Morrison! I say, get the crowd together!"

It was the voice of Benny Dawson sounding taps on the first gypsy tea. For the two under the chestnut tree that moment, one and infinite—fragile, elusive, flitting—was gone. There was time only for a word.

"Be uptown to-morrow?" Carter questioned anxiously.

"I don't know. I might."

"I thought you would probably have to mail a letter, or get some thread or—or tooth paste or something like that."

The lights of Conway's car were coming toward them through the darkness like two big eyes.

"Hair nets," she confided hurriedly. "I buy them at Morton's—at ten."

VI

CONWAY assisted Priscilla into the car. As he reseated himself behind the wheel, he leaned over the side toward Carter.

"How are the warming rays of the sun, old man, or is the moon better on green peaches?"

That was all. The motor purred loudly, and they shot away into the night.

At a quarter to ten the next morning Carter entered the shop of Trevathen & Hodges, which was immediately opposite the Morton emporium. At a quarter to eleven he looked at the hands of his watch for the sixth time in an hour, and knew what he had feared—that Priscilla would not come.

He tried desperately to remember the exact words he had used to Conway in Benny's office that memorable morning. It had been something about ripening a green peach. There was no knowing what Conway might have said!

Four o'clock was a long time coming, but even after they had all gone from the bank Carter stayed on, nervously thumbing the papers on his desk. He eyed the telephone uncertainly. Should he write, or phone, or go in person?

He lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Walnut 632. Hello, Buddy! I'd like to speak to Priscilla, please."

There was a long period of waiting.

"Yes?"

"Priscilla?"

"Yes?"

"You didn't come to town this morning." He was too much in earnest for finesse.

"Who is it talking, please?"

"Carter."

"Oh, yes." The tone conveyed the impression that she remembered having met him in the dim and distant past.

"I—I'd like to see you, Priscilla. May I come out now?"

"I'm afraid not. I—I am just going out."

Carter swallowed a big lump of pride.

"Then I'll meet you somewhere—anywhere you say."

"I should like to, really, but I am going with Chet to see one of his patients out on the Sparta pike."

She waited politely for Carter to terminate the call. He could feel the politeness over the wire.

"Priscilla!" There was pleading in the tone. "Will you tell me what—what Conway said to you last night coming home?"

"What are you talking about, Carter?"

"Don't you know?"

"Y-e-s, I know."

"Isn't it the fair thing for me to know?"

"Certainly. He intimated that you had been wonderfully kind to me, and that I should feel tremendously grateful to you all the rest of my life."

There was a groan from the other end of the line.

"I've got to see you!"

"Don't distress yourself. It isn't necessary. I do appreciate your efforts, Carter, but I'm afraid I shall always be a little green."

There was a faint note like the tremolo of a violin string, and the receiver clicked into place.

VII

ON his way home that evening Carter crossed the grass and dropped down on a step of Maggie Doty's porch. She was stringing beans for the next day's dinner. In a brooding silence the boy lighted his pipe while the snapping went on.

"Maryville's a dead town, Miss Mag—absolutely dead, but it won't lie down. I'm thinking of going out West. There's really nothing to hold me—nothing but dad."

Maggie eyed him sharply as he sat hunched on the lowest step.

"Think again, Carter. There might be."

"Too late to think! I've been a fool, Miss Mag—a big one."

The pipe stem crunched as he bit into it. The twinkle in her eye might have been a tear.

"Thinking of leaving soon, Carter?"

"Soon as I can talk dad around to it. I never did expect to live always in Maryville, and I'd better go now before it saps all my pep." He arose and shook out the pipe. "No use to stay in a town once you know it's a corpse."

"Not if you're young enough, Carter. Don't accept things you don't like. Fight 'em out!"

The quiet intensity of her words stirred him to a sudden sympathy. He patted her shoulder awkwardly, and then went home to read "Locksley Hall" and certain passages from Byron. He was, he felt, aging fast.

When the news leaked out that Carter Morrison was going West, it leaked like water through a sieve. It fairly splashed. Carter himself did not know how it leaked, but he accepted it, and began looking up time-tables. Judge Morrison admitted that he and Carter had talked about it; but it was from Maggie Doty that the most satisfactory details came.

The one person in Maryville who seemed uninterested in the young man's departure was Priscilla Graham. When Maggie called her in and remarked casually that the blue and white striped stuff that shimmered under her machine needle was the last of four silk shirts that belonged to Carter's trip, she murmured:

"How interesting!"

Then she tilted her nose and fluttered the leaves of a fashion book.

"I reckon the young crowd will miss him some," Maggie observed, as she ended a seam and tied the threads. "Lived here ever since he was born, and now he's going for good."

"For—for good! I didn't know that he wasn't—ever—coming back."

"No—he isn't coming back. He says the opportunities out there are better. I guess he's right, but this old town will miss him. I used to be able to tell when it was ten o'clock by Carter's whistle when he went home at night. I haven't lately. He doesn't seem to whistle any more."

She looked anxiously at the girl in the chair, who somehow reminded her of a tea rose whose petals were beginning to droop.

"I'll never forget, Priscilla, how sweet you looked the night he took you to the party out at the Jacksons'. Carter said—"

Here Maggie paused, picked off a few stray threads, and held the garment up for inspection.

"You were saying something about Carter, Miss Mag—something he said to you about my dress that night," Priscilla prompted, with an effort.

"Oh, yes! Well, it wasn't the dress—it was you. He said you looked all starry and sweet, like a jasmine."

"Did he really?" The girl's lips parted wistfully. "There's something I should like to—"

She stopped quickly. A crooked smile curved her lips, but her eyes held the pitious look of a little girl who has been slapped.

"Never mind! I'll probably think of it later," she said.

Maggie opened her lips to speak, and then shut them. After all, she could only be the scenesifter. She suddenly felt old and awkward, as she fumbled to thread a needle.

Outside, the sun shone directly overhead. The town clock boomed the hour of twelve. Through the window Maggie saw, far up the street, a thin stream of people going home to their midday dinner. She raised her eyebrows and achieved the same expression that other people have when they look over their glasses at you. It was an expression of deep concentration—the kind required when cutting out a garment from limited material having a right and wrong side.

"You sit right there till I finish this neckband, Priscilla," she said evenly, when her visitor put out a hand for her frilly sun-bonnet. "Your mother's been wanting a cutting from my yellow honeysuckle. I'll get it directly. There's no rush."

VIII

WHEN Priscilla leaned back listlessly, Maggie leaned forward interestedly. Shading her eyes with her hand, she looked anxiously up the hot, dusty street. What kind of a suit did Carter wear? She couldn't for the life of her remember. With trembling fingers she pushed a damp lock of hair out of her eyes. Sometimes he was late. She leaned over the machine and peered.

It may have been the heat of early sum-

mer, or it may have been because her eye was on the street and not the work in hand. The needle shot up—shot down—crunch! It caught the nail, ripping it through.

When Maggie cried out, Priscilla turned, saw the blood stain spreading on the silk, and saw the older woman's head drop forward on her arm. In two jumps she was out on the sidewalk, beckoning wildly to the first person in sight. That first person came on the run. He fairly sprinted.

"What the deuce—" he began.

Priscilla shoved him through the door.

"Maggie ran the machine needle through her finger," she flung at him. "She's fainted. You put her on the couch while I run for water. Maybe we'll need a doctor."

But when Carter leaned over to pick up the limp figure, he was pushed aside by a capable arm. Maggie had never fainted in her life, and already the ruse was palling.

"It's nothing," she declared, sitting bolt upright. "Get out of my way, Carter, while I get that bottle of turpentine and a strip of muslin. Little jab like that! A body'd think I was murdered!"

Maggie Doty got up, steadied herself, and stood firm. She walked over to her bedroom, went in, and shut the door—all but a slight crack.

In the room she had quitted there was youth and love and the world well lost. There was the fragrance of honeysuckle from the south window; there was the cling-

ing sweetness of a mellow peach nearer—quite near.

Through long, restless nights Carter had rehearsed the things he would say if he ever had the chance. He opened his lips, but they had all gone from him now. He looked at the girl pleadingly, but her glance passed him. His heart, apparently, was pounding in his throat; but finally he spoke.

"I want you to believe that anything I—well, anything I said before that night—that first night—doesn't count. You see, I had never known a girl like you, because—there— isn't any!"

She made no response.

"Priscilla!"

There was unutterable longing in Carter's cry. She did not look at him, but the palms of her pink hands were pressed hard against the fiber of the chair.

"You mustn't mind my telling you—that I love you—now that I'm going away."

"Oh, Carter!"

In an instant his arms were around her, and she was crying softly on his shirt collar. Melted was the snow and ice; the little green peach had mellowed in the warming rays of the sun.

Inside there was the conscious shuffle of a chair. A reasonable time elapsed, and Maggie Doty cautiously opened the door. She looked at the two young lovers, and her face was alight with the reflection of a great happiness.

THE RETURN

MOUNTAINS at the pasture edge, shadowy and tall;

A silver mist crumbling like a shattered gray wall.

Not a single leaf fluttered,

Not the slightest breeze stirred;

The silence of deep places was the only sound I heard.

But suddenly across the sky there swept a saffron light—

A chord of golden music that climbed the mountain height,

And lingered for a moment,

So vibrant and intense

The very air was breathless with wondering suspense.

And then a splendid scarlet crash—the earth a lyric flame,

As with her gorgeous ancient rites the proud young morning came!

She laughed among the tree tops,

She whipped the winds to strife,

And brought adventure back again to hearts grown tired of life!

Ruth Forbes Eliot

Wild Bird

A STORY OF THE WILD NEW LANDS OF THE CANADIAN
NORTHWEST

By Hulbert Footner

Author of "The Man Hunt," "Country Love," "Thieves' Wit," etc.

XX

ANN sat where she was, bruised and apathetic. She felt that she had lost all hope of controlling Chako Lyllac, now that he was hot on the trail of her father's gold.

Hearing him come running out of the shack, she sharply turned her head. He had come for wood. He gathered up a store he had laid ready beside the fire, and ran into the shack again.

Ann could not bring herself to approach the place. She watched. Presently, by the light that sprang up inside, she knew he had built a fire to give light for his search for the gold.

By and by he came out. Ann saw at a glance that he had found nothing. He had himself better in hand, but his voice was still strained with excitement.

"Of course the old fox wouldn't leave it around in plain view," he said. "I'll find it to-morrow!"

Having put off his satisfaction until the morning, Chako set about spreading his blankets. Ann knew that he would be asleep almost as soon as he lay down. She crept away under her tent.

She lay there, too crushed to feel any active pain; but such was the weight on her breast that it was hard to breathe. She was no longer tormented by maddening thoughts. She lay quiet enough.

"All that gold!" she said to herself. "It is mine, and he will never forgive me for it. He is lost, and so am I!"

Sleep was out of the question for her. She rolled up one of the sides of her little tent, and tied it. Sitting up, she saw Chako a little way off, rolled up in his blanket,

a formless bundle by the fire, with one shoulder sticking up.

His pose suggested an utter callousness. She turned away her head. This was not Chako, she thought—not the man she loved, but a wicked changeling.

She looked out over the lake. It was a moonlight night, but the moon was not high enough to look down into that deep bowl. The sky was a sea of gray light, out of which a few stars, like pin points, glimmered wanly. The moon was somewhere behind the great mountain up whose flanks they had climbed the day before. The vast, blunt summit was outlined against the pale sky, black as the shadow of doom. The peak at the other end of the lake—the gold peak—was bathed in a heavenly, tender radiance.

It was all too grand, too tremendous. What business had puny humans amid such surroundings? Down in the bottom of the bowl the lake slept in a black and awful stillness, through which the sound of falling water came like the rolling of a drum.

When Ann came out of her tent in the morning, Chako was already at work. He had unceremoniously pitched all Joe Maury's poor belongings outside the shack, and was grubbing about within.

She set about making a fire as well as she could. Chako had never allowed her to do this before. After several attempts, she got it started, and prepared the breakfast. When it was ready, she called Chako, but he paid no attention, and she sat down to eat alone.

Suddenly he came running out of the shack with his eyes blazing. There was a visible change for the worse in his face. His expression had become brutalized.

"Two hundred pounds of gold!" he cried.

To Ann it was like the cry of a madman.

"Have you found it?" she asked with sinking heart.

"No," he said, "but that's the amount of it! Joe Grouser kept a tally on the back of the door. He shaved the poles down to give himself a clean place to write on. So many ounces a day—sometimes four, sometimes six, sometimes ten. It totals more than two hundred pounds. Now I *know* it's here!"

Ann's breast experienced a sort of jaded thrill. Two hundred pounds of gold was a fortune. She had a momentary glimpse of what it would buy; but she could not get excited over it. She looked at Chako's changed face, and hated the gold.

"You take it pretty cool," Chako said, with a hard glance of suspicion. "Maybe you knew it was here."

Ann shrugged.

"Did you know it was here?" he demanded, with an evil look.

"That's a foolish question!" Ann cried, exasperated. "How could I expect to get it out of here without letting you know about it? Could I hide two hundred pounds in my clothes?"

Chako, however, was deaf to reason. He continued to glance at her darkly.

Having bolted some food, he jumped up and recommenced his search. Having exhausted the possibilities of the shack, he searched outside it, striding back and forth across the little clearing and under the trees, searching every inch of the ground for some evidences of its surface having been disturbed.

He gave particular attention to the roots of every stump, loosening the earth around them with his hunting knife, and scooping it out with his hands. To Ann, whose imagination had been so struck in the first place by his wild pride of bearing, it was inexpressibly painful to see him squatting there, clawing at the earth, so eager in his sordid quest.

He was too excited, too impatient. There was no method in his search, for he went here and there at random, covering the same ground over and over.

Later it seemed to occur to him that he would never succeed in this way. He went off to the diggings, and presently returned with a shovel. With this he started to dig

up the floor of the shack, throwing the earth outside with powerful strokes. The earth was packed very hard, and presently, in his reckless impatience, he broke the handle of his precious implement off short. He flung it from him with bitter curses.

Thereafter he had only his knife to loosen the earth with. He kept at work the greater part of the day, carefully carrying the earth outside on a square of canvas. In the afternoon he went off to search the two paths—one climbing the broken rocks to the cliffs, the other running down the shore to the diggings.

Next morning Chako climbed to the top of the shack, and commenced jabbing his knife into the sods, going over it foot by foot. The consciousness of the futility of his occupation did not tend to make his temper better. From time to time he cast furious glances at Ann, as if daring her to ridicule him.

Later he pushed all the sods off the roof, and flung down the poles. Finally he began to throw down the walls, tapping each log from end to end with the butt of his knife, to make sure it was not hollow. He pushed over the chimney. By midday there was nothing left but a heap of ruins. Then, suddenly fearful that he had covered up the desired spot, he carried off all the debris to one side, and dug again.

The relentless passage of time drove him well-nigh frantic, and by evening he was almost tearful in his balked rage. His language did not spare Ann's ears. Ann did not mind that. She did not mind anything in him that was rude and strong. It was cupidity and meanness that sickened her heart.

"The devil is in it!" cried Chako. "If Joe Grouser visited his cache every night to put away the day's takings, either it must have been inside his shack, or he must have made a path to it. That stands to reason; but I've leveled his shack to the ground and dug all around it, and I've searched every foot of the way alongside the only two paths there are!"

Ann said nothing. A hope was beginning to stir in her breast that he would not be able to find the gold. This was the end of the third day. In two days more they must start back or run serious risk of going hungry.

She could not visualize the future at all. She had only a dim feeling that if she

could get Chako away from that evil spot, she might get him back again.

He seemed to read her thoughts. He cast a baleful look on her.

"What have you got to say about it?" he snarled.

"I have nothing to say," replied Ann.

"No, but you can look a whole lot. You've got a damned disagreeable look, if you ask me!"

What could Ann do but press her lips together, though she knew it was her silences that most exasperated him?

"You're hoping I'll have to leave here without it!" Chako shouted accusingly.

The goaded Ann suddenly raised her eyes to his.

"Yes, I am," she said.

"I knew it! I knew you were against me! Sitting so quiet, and always working against me in your mind!"

"And if you want to know why," cried Ann, raising her voice in turn, "it's because it makes a beast of you—worse than whisky!"

"Yah, you talk like a namby-pamby Sunday school teacher!" he snarled. "You're not human. You make me sick with your superiority!"

He walked away.

Not human! The phrase hurt Ann worse than the commonest and most abusive epithet he could have flung at her. He hated her because she could not descend to his present level.

She resolved never to let herself speak out again. It was too horrible to wrangle with him. When she did so, she lost what influence she still had with him. He was a little afraid of her when she was silent. That was why he was always trying to provoke a quarrel. Hereafter, whatever happened, whatever Chako might say to her, she would hold her tongue!

In the morning Chako was mum and black-browed. He wouldn't come to eat until Ann had finished. He spoke but once, and that threateningly.

"Don't you waste anything. We'll need it all."

Afterward he went off up the trail over the rocks.

When Ann had finished cleaning up, she sat down on the shelving ledge of rock at the edge of the water. She knew how bad idleness was for one in her situation, but she had exhausted all the possible small tasks around camp. She had nothing to

busy her but her black thoughts. Not a ray of light ahead!

She sprang up at last. She could not stand it. Anything, anything, to escape such thoughts! She must find something to do. Suppose she started looking for the gold, too? Where would one start looking for it?

If she had been her father, where would she have hidden it? Instantly the reply came—in a place so simple that nobody would ever think of looking there. But that was all very well. The knotty question remained—how could he have visited his hiding place every day without leaving a path to it?

She looked around her. The only visible path led from the spot where his door had been down to the edge of the flat rock where she had been sitting, then off to the left, on its way to the diggings. The first few yards of it were more clearly marked than the rest. No doubt that was because he went down to get water off the edge of the rock. That was the natural place for drawing water—the place where Ann herself got it. The rock overhung the lake a little, and you could dip in easily.

At this point in her reasoning Ann's heart began to beat. *The rock overhung a little!* She went quickly down to the edge and looked over. The water was about two feet deep, as clear as greenish glass, and with a shelving, pebbly bottom. It came up to within an inch or two of the surface of the ledge, and ran back underneath. There was a space under there that she could not see into.

She looked guiltily around her. Chako was not in sight. She nervously rolled up her sleeve, and, stretching herself out on the rock, thrust her arm into the icy water and reached back.

Her hand met something smooth and hard—a surface of canvas. She felt about it. It revealed itself to the touch as a thick, squat bag, resting firmly on the bottom of the lake. The top was not closed, but rolled back all around. She could put her hand inside. She could feel the hard, smooth grains; a curious waxy feel they had.

Ann rose up, squeezed the water off her arm, thoughtfully rolled down her sleeve, and buttoned the cuff. Her secret filled her with terror. What was she to do with it? She would have given anything now not to have known. The discovery forced

upon her the agonizing necessity of deciding what was best to do.

Should she tell Chako, and let matters take their course? Ah, how tempting that was—to let things take their course—to drift! She was tired of struggling. She played with the temptation for a while, but, in spite of her, the firmer strain in her nature gradually crystallized.

Chako would only fling it away. She pictured all the terrible, laborious years during which the gold had been stored up pinch by pinch, and it seemed wicked that it should be wasted without anybody being the better. Being the better! On the contrary, there was gold enough in that bag to feed the evil in Chako till it consumed him body and soul.

Suppose she gave it to him freely, and he lowered his pride sufficiently to accept it. It would kill his pride—that wild pride which was his strength; and how he would hate her afterward for having destroyed him!

On the other hand, suppose she told him, and kept the gold for herself. In his present temper he was perfectly capable of killing her for it. Whichever way you looked at it, it was ruinous. Let it lie! Let it lie!

XXI

WHEN Chako came back to the camp fire late that afternoon, even with his abounding health he showed traces of the flame that was ravaging him. His eyes were hollowed, and there were hard creases about his mouth. Without a look or a word in Ann's direction, he flung himself down on his back, and threw an arm over his face.

Hard and savage though suffering made him appear, it was real suffering. His nostrils were pinched with pain. Ann's heart melted at the sight. He looked such a boy!

Should she not tell him, after all, that the gold was within ten paces of him? How sweet it would be to see joy break in his haggard face! Surely joy would humanize him!

If he had looked at her at that moment, it must all have come tumbling out; but he kept his eyes covered, and Ann's sterner self had time to rally.

"This is merely weakness," it said to her. "You thought this all out when you were cool. You must stick to it, and not

think any more. If you begin to wobble, everything will be lost."

She looked at Chako no more, and kept on with her work. He was discouraged, but not softened at all. Presently he raised himself up, to inquire harshly:

"Haven't you got anything for me to eat? You've had nothing else to do."

Ann's pride reared up, but she curbed it. Better to yield in little things, for the sake of standing firm in the big one.

"I'm getting it ready," she said quietly.

"You've cooked too much," he complained, when he came to eat.

"The usual amount," Ann told him.

"We can't afford that now. Put part of it aside for the morning. You shouldn't need much, doing nothing all day!"

Ann looked at him—and held her tongue. After all, this was merely childish. She helped him to his customary portion of rice and bacon, and took about half her share.

"Doing the saintly act now, eh?" Chako sneered.

Ann was not yet subdued by pain. Her eyes flashed at him. By way of answer, she took the rest of her portion from frying pan and cooking pot, and coolly ate it before him.

Chako said nothing at the moment, though his face was black with rage. When he rose, he observed:

"If you gorge yourself now, you'll only have to go hungry later. I'm not going to leave here until I find what I'm looking for."

"You're mad!" said Ann.

"Sure," he said. "It's great to be crazy!"

"What good will it do you if you haven't strength enough to carry it out?"

"Oh, finding it will give me plenty of strength," said Chako, with the smile of one possessed. "I'm going to take to-morrow off to hunt. There are ptarmigan on the mountain, and I might get a shot at a goat."

Ann's heart went down sickeningly. All her hopes were set on the next morning but one. If their departure were delayed, where would she find the strength to go on with?

Chako went back up the rocks.

Having washed the dishes and put all in order, Ann sat down to her customary vigil on the flat rock. Though the sun had sunk behind the mountain, it would not be dark for two hours yet; but already the deathly

twilight stillness was settling on the lake. It was always still down in the bottom of that deep bowl, but the goodly sun had the effect of creating a pleasant bustle; and when he withdrew, like a beloved friend departing all too soon, that evil, freezing stillness immediately began to reach out its feelers.

To Ann, sitting there with her breast made tender by pain, it seemed as if the very trees turned into stone. In all created things the stubborn will to live seemed to faint. It was difficult to breathe such an air.

By and by Ann was greatly startled to hear a sound in the stillness—that is, a sound other than the drumming of the falls, which was always there, like an accompaniment to the stillness. It was the sound of dropping stones, and Chako must be making it. After a moment she succeeded in placing it. It came from the cliffs above the falls.

As she listened, Ann's very soul seemed to congeal with horror. The cairn they had raised together! Chako was throwing it down, stone by stone. His purpose was only too clear. In the clothes of the dreadful ruined thing that lay beneath, he hoped to find a clew to the whereabouts of the gold.

Ann flung herself down on the rock, wreathing her arms about her head in an effort to shut out the sounds. She still heard them in her brain. It was too much to be borne. Jumping up, she paced the shore, still with her arms about her head; but whether she lay or whether she walked, she could not escape the horror.

How could he? How could he? How could she bear to see his hands again? Would he have the humanity to cover it up, or must she walk by that spot and see it? What good to turn her head away, if she knew it was there? Ah, how different from the Chako who had shielded her from the sight of the horror when they came!

At this thought something broke inside her, and she wept. She crawled into her tent.

In the morning she was outwardly composed, but it was the last effort of self-control. Even Chako was made uneasy by her white and stony aspect; but he said nothing.

Ann finally said, in a hurried, breathless voice, as if the words were the last she expected to get out:

"There is something I must ask you. I cannot bear not knowing."

"What's that?" asked Chako, with an insolent stare.

Ann caught her breath. She pressed her hand against her lower lip to control its trembling.

"Did you—did you cover the body up again?" she whispered.

Chako was not so completely invulnerable as he appeared. He started back as if she had struck him, and his tanned face turned yellowish.

"Why—why, what the hell do you—" he began.

"Oh, there's no magic in it," Ann said hurriedly. "I could hear quite plainly what you were doing."

Chako looked away.

"Yes, I covered him up," he muttered.

Ann turned her back on him. She knew he had not done so. However, as soon as he had eaten, he went off up the rocks with a nonchalant air that was plainly an assumption, and presently Ann could hear him piling back the stones. The tension in her breast was somewhat relieved. After all, there was a spark of humanity in him, or he would not spend the moments that were so precious to him in this tribute to the dead.

He went hunting. In the afternoon he returned to camp, empty-handed, discouraged, and savage as a starving dog. Ann, watching him warily, handed him his food in silence. There was one question, though, that she had to ask.

"There is only one day's rations left. Are we going to start back to-morrow?"

Chako was silent for a moment. His face was convulsed.

"Yes," he muttered at last.

Ann was squatting on her heels across the fire from him, watching her last baking. She began to tremble all over. Clenching her hands and her teeth, she fought it desperately, kneeling there in silence. For some seconds the result hung in the balance. Her throat was quivering hysterically, but she still fought. She would have won, too, had not Chako looked over at her sneeringly.

"What the hell's the matter with you now?" he said. "You've got your way, haven't you?"

That finished her. She flung herself down, trying to stifle the wild sobs that tore her.

"Oh, God!" said Chako. "Always bawling!"

He savagely gulped his food. Ann crept away to the water's edge. After all, it was from relief that she had broken down, and it was not long before she succeeded in controlling herself. She went back to the fire, shamed, softened, tremulous, her breast all warm. In such a mood she felt an imperative need of making friends with her companion.

"I'm sorry I was so silly," she murmured. "I've been under a strain. I've taken a horror of this place. I felt that another day of it would drive me mad."

"Pretty happy about going, aren't you?" sneered Chako.

"Ah, yes!" murmured Ann, with a lifting breast.

It enraged him. He violently struck his fist on the ground.

"Well, I'm not!" he cried. "It drives me simply wild to have to go back without the stuff!"

He flung down his empty plate, and walked away; but before Ann's bread had finished baking, back he came. There was something brewing in his skull. He looked at her evilly. He sat down, the better to see into her face.

"Don't you think that gold is hidden somewhere about here?" he demanded.

Ann steeled herself for the ordeal that she saw impending.

"Why, I suppose so, since you found the tally," she said.

"Then how is it you're so content to leave without it?"

"I told you the place has got on my nerves."

"That don't seem like much of an answer," said Chako, boring her cruelly with his hard glance; "not from a woman who says she's only got six hundred dollars a year to live on."

"Well, that's the truth."

Chako grunted. He was silent for a moment, studying her.

"What's your notion of the kind of hiding place he'd hit on?" he asked cunningly.

"I have no idea," said Ann.

"Haven't you been looking, too, while I was away?"

"No—I left it to you."

Chako sneered.

"You must have thought about it."

"Yes, I thought about it."

"Well, what did you think?"

"I thought of many things," said Ann. "Perhaps he had a hiding place among the trees, and made a point of approaching it by a different route each time, so as not to leave a path. Perhaps he let the stuff accumulate for a week or a month before stowing it away. He may have died the day after making his last visit."

"Not good enough!" muttered Chako. "I have looked under every tree."

"Perhaps he had several hiding places," said Ann.

"Then he'd have to have a diagram, wouldn't he? Or he'd forget where they were himself."

There was another silence. These silences, while he stared at her, were more demoralizing to Ann than his questions.

"Are you coming back for it?" he asked suddenly.

This question threw Ann into confusion. Either answer was charged with danger. She needed time to think. She hesitated fatally.

"No!" she said at last.

"Ha!" cried Chako. "Why, that's not human!"

"Well, you've accused me often enough of not being human," retorted Ann.

"Don't bandy words with me!" he cried roughly. "Nobody, man nor woman, would willingly turn their backs on all that gold. You're lying!"

Ann sat still as a stone. He leaned forward on hands and knees, sticking his face toward her across the fire.

"Do you know where the gold is?" he asked her.

"No," said Ann, steadily meeting his crazed eyes.

"You lie!"

Ann held fast.

"You lie!" he repeated, beating the ground, working himself up. "I see it all now. You knew from the first that it was up here, and where it was. You wouldn't tell me before we started, because you thought I'd strike too hard a bargain. You thought, as time passed, you could work me the way you wanted. I know women! And when you found out I wasn't the kind of man a woman could work, you changed your mind. Now you want to get out as quick as possible, so you can find an easier man to your purpose!"

"This is nonsense!" protested Ann.

He was deaf and frenzied.

"Well, your tricks and your lies won't

do you any good!" he shouted. "We don't leave this place till I get the gold!"

"Then we shall starve."

"No, we won't starve, either, because you're going to tell me now!"

Ann sat silently calling on all her strength to meet the test.

"Yes, and you needn't think you can sit there so quiet, and pit your will against mine!" cried Chako. "What do I care about your will power? What good is will power to you, when I could break your back across my knee like a dry twig?"

"That wouldn't do you any good," said Ann.

"Then you *do* know! You *do* know!" he cried. "I'll find a way to make you tell me! I won't break your back, but I'll twist your arm between my two hands until it breaks—first one arm and then the other!"

Ann looked him in the eyes and held out her arm. The act took him aback for a moment. His eyes bolted; but in the moment of her ascendancy Ann saw that she had lost. Though his eyes could not meet hers, his teeth were grinding with a fresh access of rage. Womanlike, she suddenly surrendered in order to save Chako from himself.

"The gold is in the lake, under the edge of the rock yonder," she said.

Her voice was proudly indifferent. The die was cast. What mattered anything now?

"Ha, ha! I thought that would fetch you!" cried Chako, with a roar of hateful laughter.

Ann bent a strange look on him. He would never understand!

"I didn't find it until yesterday," she said.

He paid no attention. He was already at the edge of the rock. Flinging himself down, he reached under it. His head was turned sidewise, and on his face was an intense, withdrawn look, as if all the forces of his being were held in suspense.

When his hand met the bag underneath, all the tense lines broke up into a look of pure, devilish joy. Ann sat where he had left her, watching him. All bootied as he was, he forthwith leaped into the water, and, reaching under the rock with both hands, dragged the bag out.

While it was under water it was not hard to move, but it required all the strength of his back and arms to lift it clear. He

got a knee under it, and hoisted it. As it thudded down on the rock, the old canvas split asunder, and a gorgeous yellow flood poured out on the rock.

With an inhuman cry, Chako sprang out of the water and knelt beside the gold. His eyes were daft with joy. He dug his fingers into the yellow heap and let the grains slide through. He poured them from hand to hand. He pounced on a lump here and there, only to drop it, as a bigger lump caught his eye.

Ann looked away, sickened by the sight. What hope now, she thought?

"Ah, pretty, pretty!" Chako was muttering, quite beside himself. "Like a woman's hair, like sunshine, like old wine! The brightest stuff in all the world! And plenty of it! Plenty of it! By God, when I change this I'll make myself felt! Not Fort Edward, the lousy little settlement, but Vancouver for me—Winnipeg—New York! I'll show those damned Easterners how a man spends his money! I'll *buy* their tinhorn cities! God, what a drunk I'll go on!"

This was more than Ann could bear. Though her life depended on keeping silent, she had to speak.

"It happens to be mine," she said.

Chako cast a poisonous look on her, and fell suddenly silent.

XXII

THE hostile travelers could not escape each other. They had to go on together in their bitter hostility, sharing their packs, dividing the work of each camping place, eating together, and sleeping within sight of each other. They exchanged no speech of any sort, except what could not be avoided. They did not quarrel any more; their hostility was too deep.

Twice during the first night Ann, in her bed off to one side, awoke to see Chako sitting up by the fire with his eyes fixed on her somberly—not as a man looks at a woman, but as he looks at his enemy.

"He hates me so much it wakes him out of his sleep!" Ann thought.

Such looks did not grieve her any more. She had got beyond that, too. In every nerve she was braced to fight the danger that threatened her.

Now that Chako had the gold in his possession, his frenzy had subsided. To one of his simple nature possession was the main thing. He never let it out of his sight; he

slept with an arm thrown over it. His violence gave place to a hard, secret watchfulness. During every waking moment Ann was conscious of being watched.

The unnatural situation was cruelly hard on one of her quick nature. Though she knew herself to be in the right, hour by hour she could feel her strength and courage abrading by contact with Chako's flinty surface.

That same night they made all their preparations to start back. They had nothing out of which to make bags for the gold, except Ann's little tent. Seeing Chako's covetous eyes upon it, she made haste to offer it to him before he could take it by force. After all, the mosquitoes were over for the season, and the tent afforded her no other protection. Ann had come down to basic things. She really preferred to sleep in the open, where she could better see what Chako was about.

Chako cut squares out of the light, strong material, in which he tied up portions of the gold, and made two larger bags to contain the smaller ones.

By daybreak they were on the trail. Having eaten all their food, they had little to carry out of the valley, save their blankets and the gold; but that was load enough. Two laborious trips were required in order to get it all up to the top of the ridge.

From that point Chako insisted on pushing on with their entire load at once. The gold was roughly divided into four parts, of which Ann took one and Chako the other three. It was a crushing weight, even for one of his physique; nevertheless he shouldered it doggedly.

Ann's burden was almost as heavy for her, but she started down the other side of the mountain with a thankful heart. Whatever might be before her could not be worse than what she had suffered in that hole in the earth; and now they were headed for a peopled and friendly land.

Chako, bowed under that killing weight, went sidewise down the steep track, balancing himself with one hand against the stones behind him. The expression of his face was agonized, and every few steps he was compelled to rest; but he never staggered or fell.

Down through the forest of little sticks they went, and into the big timber, where Chako led the way, steady-footed, across the great fallen logs and around the treach-

erous holes. There was something magnificent in his determination. The distance was perhaps eight miles in a straight line, and they were eighteen hours on the way.

When they arrived at the hut by the river, Chako was completely done. He could only lie inert on the floor. He refused food. Even so, his thought was all of the gold. He got what Ann had carried, and, putting it with his, kept the whole treasure beside him.

The next day Chako was unable to travel. After all, his feat of endurance had gained them nothing in time.

He sat on the river bank in the sun, recuperating his strength. He had now put all the packages of gold into the stout canvas bag in which he had formerly kept his spare clothes. He had this beside him, and he amused himself by taking out the small bags, counting them, weighing them in his hand, opening one at a time, spreading out the contents on the ground, and lovingly ruffling the grains with his palm. Then he would tie up the square of silk with the greatest care, put it away, and take out another.

To Ann, watching him from a little distance with dark eyes, it was a dreadful sight. To see him there, in his splendid youth and strength, so utterly besotted! It was old men who went crazy about gold. He was so infatuated that he was beyond shame; he didn't care that she was watching him.

Seeing him fondle the gold, Ann conceived a breathless hatred of the stuff. It was that which had taken him from her, which had destroyed his manhood.

Yet she could not drag her eyes away. Even now she was unable to despise him. He was still beautiful in her sight, and unspeakably dear to her heart. To-day he had knocked off work. Relaxed and softened by fatigue, he looked boyish again. He was smiling, but all his smiles and soft looks were directed toward the gold—those soft looks which had been hers for a few moments. He was smiling at the gold as if he shared a secret with it.

Ann could not bear it. It was foul and unnatural that gold should so bewitch a young man. She abruptly got up, and walked away along the river bank.

Walking up and down out of his sight, she tormented herself. How insane it was to be jealous of a *thing*! She must get the better of it. Ah, but how unspeakably

humiliating it was to be cast aside for a bag of earthy stuff!

She, Ann, was the fit mate for Chako; her heart told her so. She could have helped him find himself. She knew she was not the sort of woman that got her hooks into a man, to use Chako's own phrase. She could have loved him, and exacted no price. She would have had him love her freely or not at all. Now the gold had him fast—held him by his basest feelings.

Chako called her, and she went drearily back.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing, only I was lonesome," he said with a grin.

Here was a change of mood! Ann glanced at him, astonished, and sat down without a word.

Chako talked carelessly about this and that. He put away the little bags of gold, and, twisting a line about the neck of the big bag, fastened it elaborately. Then he fell silent. Pulling out his pipe, he filled it reflectively.

Chako did not often condescend to think, and when he did the process was visible. Ann wondered apprehensively what was coming. The slightest alteration in his temper concerned her so vitally! She caught him glancing at her with a wary, speculative eye.

She went and got some mending, to help keep her in countenance. Time passed. It was a peaceful scene, but Ann's breast was filled with a great disquiet. Finally meal-time approached, and she started clumsily to make a fire. Chako immediately hobbled over to her.

"That's my job," he said.

Ann looked at him, startled. Days had passed since he had last shown any disposition to lighten her tasks. He was grinning at her now in a friendly fashion, but his eyes did not share in it; they were still sizing her up coolly. Ann was not reassured. She drew back, and let him make the fire.

"This poplar's no good to start a fire with," he said, tossing it away. "You want dry pine. In this kind of country there's always plenty of tinder handy. See those little spines that stick out of the pine trunks?"

As he spoke, he gathered a handful of the twigs. Ann watched him, a little alarmed. It was very uncharacteristic of Chako to make talk in this pleasant man-

ner. After the last few days, it was astounding. Ann could not imagine what was brewing. A nature so wild and unreasoning as Chako's gave you no line to go on.

"Different kinds of wood are like different natures of men," he went on, kneeling to his task. "Poplar burns slow and sulky, with a spicy smell and plenty of smoke. Not much good, except to keep off mosquitoes. Pine burns quick and hot; burns down to a fine ash. Hard wood—only there isn't any in this country—hard wood catches slow, and burns steady and clear. A hardwood log will burn up by itself, while pine needs two or three sticks for company."

When the fire was well started, Ann came forward to prepare the meal.

"Go away and sit down," said Chako. "I bet you're just as tired as me. I'll be cook to-day."

There was a silky tone in his voice that Ann had never heard before. Whatever his faults, Chako had always been open. He was not open now. His eyes were veiled and watchful. A sort of despair filled Ann.

"What does he want of me?" she thought.

Chako had suddenly discovered a great store of conversation.

"I see you've got beans in soak. We'll let 'em cook all afternoon, and to-night they'll be prime. Nothing like beans to stick to the ribs; but traveling like us, you don't have time to cook them right. Once when I was on the Spirit River, below the cañon, I met an old sourdough floating downstream on a little raft—a wee raft, made of four dead logs lashed together, and him sitting in the middle of it on his bag of flour, looking at the scenery while the eddies waltzed him slowly around. Well, at his feet on the raft he'd made a little platform of flat stones, with a thick layer of dried mud on top, and on the mud he'd made a little fire. There he had his pot with the beans dancing in it. That's the only case of a man cooking beans while he traveled that I ever heard of."

When the invariable bacon and rice was ready, Chako filled Ann's plate hospitably, and throughout the meal he attended to her wants. How happy it would have made her, could she have been deceived! But his method was too crude. It insulted her intelligence.

When they had finished eating, Chako sent her away from the fire. She resumed her mending of her old silk skirt, which had suffered on the strenuous trip over the mountains.

When Chako had cleaned up after a man's fashion, he came and flung himself down beside her, supporting his head on one hand, and smiling up at her. It was the old smile of charming mockery, but with a difference. It had an ulterior purpose now. His cold eyes betrayed it.

Nevertheless, Ann trembled with happiness at his mere nearness. His careless attitudes were so full of grace; his smile, though it might be false, was irresistible!

"What difference does it make what he is, good or bad?" Ann's tempter whispered. "He is your fate!"

"Member the last time I stretched out beside you?" Chako said lazily. "You were sewing then, too. You stuck me with your needle when I got fresh."

Ann could not call up a smile at the recollection.

Chako raised himself higher. The arm that supported him was warm against Ann's back. He rubbed his cheek against her shoulder. Ann, dizzy from her racing blood, thought with a sort of despair:

"He knows by instinct that he can do what he likes with me! What's the use of fighting him?"

She sewed on with nervous quickness.

"How fast your fingers fly!" Chako softly drawled. "Looks so comical to see my little man sewing for dear life! I won't know you when you put on skirts again. I'll be sorry—you're such a cocky little chap in your breeches and boots!"

Ann gave no sign. He was piqued by his failure to draw her.

"Haven't you got a word to throw me?" he grumbled.

"What is there to say?" murmured Ann, very low.

"Just like a woman!" he replied sorely. "Bound to hold things against a man until kingdom come. Got to store up every little thing until it spoils! Can't you let what's past be past? Can't we make a fresh start?"

"We could, if you were sorry for what is past," suggested Ann.

"Ah! I suppose you want me to crawl and eat dirt!"

"I don't care whether you tell me you're sorry or not. I just want you to be sorry."

"I am sorry," said Chako readily.

Ann smiled bitterly to herself. When Chako was really sorry, how differently from this he acted! His hangdog look confessed it, but the rack wouldn't drag any admission from him.

"You'll see whether I'm sorry or not," he went on. "I wouldn't be talking to you this way if I wasn't sorry, would I? I want to get things settled up."

Ann looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we got to think about the future, haven't we? We got to talk things over."

"I couldn't talk about it," Ann said swiftly. "You can have whatever you want."

He scowled.

"Ah! I wasn't talking about the stuff."

"What else did you mean, then?" she demanded.

Chako darted a hard look at her. His deep voice purred.

"Well, when you and I get out to Fort Edward, we're going to get spliced, aren't we—married?"

Ann stared at him in horror. So *that* was it!

Under that wide-eyed stare, Chako's bold glance trailed off across the river. There was a hardy swagger in his manner. His arm crept around Ann. That was what he trusted to!

Ann shook it off with a violent shudder. She scrambled to her feet, and, turning, stared at him, still unable to speak.

"It's all right, isn't it?" said Chako, scowling.

"No! No! No!" she whispered brokenly. "You don't want *me*!"

She ran away along the river bank. Chako made no attempt to follow.

Well out of sight of their camp, she dropped down on the edge of the bank, and, letting her feet hang over, stared and stared at the flowing brown water without seeing it. The old mad whirligig seized her in its grip. She was flung back and forth like the water of the Ouananeca River between the cañon walls.

"I am a fool! A woman as far gone as I am can't make conditions. I should take him and be thankful!"

"He wants the gold, not you."

"I'll take him anyhow. I'll make him want me afterward."

"He wants the gold."

"I don't care! I'll marry him and make a stand against his evil nature. I'll save him from himself."

"Folly! Folly! To accept so contemptuous an offer would destroy your pride. He would despise you for marrying him, and rightly so. You could do nothing with him. It would mean a lifelong wretchedness."

"What of it? It's my fate. Useless to struggle against it! I can't change him. He's too strong for me. If I lose him, what sort of a life would I have? The worst he could do to me wouldn't be so bad as that!"

"No! No! A lifetime of wretchedness. And your pride would be gone. You wouldn't even have pride to help you endure it."

So it went. There is no end to such a discussion.

When Ann returned to their camp, Chako lay sleeping in the exact spot where she had left him. This was another knife thrust in her breast. It was so little to him that her heart was breaking! He was so sure of getting what he wanted that he could sleep while he waited for it!

Ann felt that she had come to the end of her string. For the moment there was no more fight in her. She, too, lay down on the pine needles, a dozen feet or so from Chako, and gave herself up to the pleasure of looking at him. At least, while he was asleep, she didn't have to fight him, she told herself.

His hat had rolled off, and his bright hair was as tousled as a schoolboy's. There was no evil in his sleeping face. It was as calm as a boy's, with the corners of the lips a little turned up, ready to smile; but his bare, tanned throat was not like a boy's. It had a man's strength and beauty in the turn of it, which bewitched the gazer.

Ann gazed without thinking how the sight undermined all her forces. She gave herself up to delicious, weakening make-believe. Suppose he were as good as he seemed at this moment! Suppose he loved her truly! Suppose their hearts were open to each other!

If so, she could wake him now with a kiss. They could be everything to each other—angels and devils too, for that matter. What a golden journey would then lie before them!

While she lay dreaming, Chako opened his eyes. He smiled at her.

"Hello, kid!" he murmured.

Ann smiled back—how could she help it? Her whole heart went with her smile.

In a flash Chako had rolled over, and was scrambling toward her on hands and knees. As Ann rose, he flung an arm around her. The watchful light was still in his eyes, but now there was a film over Ann's sight that prevented her from seeing it so clearly.

"It's all right, kid, isn't it?" he asked softly. "Say you will!"

Ann's arms stole around his neck.

"I love you so! I love you so!" she murmured. "Ah, be good to me, for I cannot help myself—I love you so!"

XXIII

As long as they stayed in Joe Maury's winter camp, Ann occupied the shack at night, and Chako slept outside. There was nothing in the way of a bed or a hammock for her, but the earth floor was no harder than the earth outside, on which she had slept for many a night now, and it was a comfort to sleep within walls, rude as they were. They shut out the presence of the vast stillness.

She awakened with a painful foreboding in her breast. Her love was not destined to be a happy one. Half the night she had by turn been railing at her own weakness in giving in to Chako, and trying to find justification for it.

She told herself that he must be good at heart, for she had seen it once, and that it was only his stubbornness that forced him to appear worse than he was; but she did not really believe this. Her better sense told her that the most one could say for Chako was that the evil and the good were about equal in his nature, and that one had as good a chance as the other of prevailing in the end.

This being so, had she not, when she consented to marry him, given the evil side of him an ascendancy which the good would never be able to recover? For it was certainly the worst in Chako which had asked her to marry him. It was cupidity and cunning and hypocrisy. That was the side with which she had thrown in her lot!

Such were the dreadful thoughts that lay with Ann on her hard bed; but, being human and young, she could not altogether give up hope. Surely things could not be as bad as all that! It was hope which enabled her to sleep at last.

Now, in the morning, it seemed to her as if everything depended on the way in which he first looked at her. His first glance must be unconscious. In it he was bound to reveal the true state of his feelings; in it she would read her fate.

She dwelt on this thought for so long that when she was finally ready to go out, she could not bring her trembling hand to open the door. Suppose he looked at her with dislike or contempt! She paced the little shack, all but wringing her hands; but a door must be opened sooner or later. Finally, with her heart in her mouth, she stepped out.

Chako was kneeling beside the fire, with his back to her. He did not look around, though he must have heard the door open. Ann was obliged to speak.

"Good morning!"

Chako flung a careless glance over his shoulder.

"Morning!"

This hurt, but it was not conclusive, for it was Chako's ordinary manner. She wanted to find out for sure. She went up to him slowly, dreadfully conscious that there was something cringing in her manner, and dropped to her knees beside him. He was placing sticks on the fire with the intense concentration he devoted to every task, however small.

"Chako!" she whispered.

"I've got a good fire for you," he said, without turning his head. "You get breakfast while I roll up the beds and pack everything."

"Chako!" she whispered. "Have you forgotten last night?"

He looked at her in simple surprise.

"Why, no," he said. "We're engaged, aren't we? Everything's all right. You don't want to back out, do you?"

"No," she murmured.

Taking her answer for granted, he was already on his feet, starting toward the canoe. Ann lowered her head to hide the hot tears that dropped on the ground—tears of bitterest mortification.

"You let yourself in for this!" she told herself.

The worst of it was that Chako was in an entirely good humor. Surliness would have been easier for her to forgive. His head was full of nothing in the world but the details of their forthcoming trip.

"What bothers me," he said, surveying their baggage, "is that we've got just a

little too much for two trips around the cañon, and not enough for three."

"You are a fool!" Ann said to herself, and tried to meet him on his own matter-of-fact level. "You must not overexert yourself again," she told him.

"Oh, the portage around the cañon's on an easy grade," said Chako confidently. "Besides, it's not so far."

After a hasty breakfast he loaded the canoe. The bag of gold was his main concern, of course. As the landing in front of their camp was shelving, he was obliged to wade into the water in order to place the heavy weight in the center of the canoe. It was no child's play to shoulder it, and to lower it into the frail craft without dropping it through the bottom. A great sigh of relief escaped Chako when he accomplished it.

"Thank God, I won't have to move him again till we unload at the cañon," he said. He settled the bag into place with affectionate hands. "Fat little beggar!" he said. "Do you know, sometimes I can't believe he's real! I wake up in the morning and think it's all a dream, until I see it there beside me, and get my hands on it!" He stroked the canvas sides. "I believe a man could tell what was inside this just by the feel!" he said dreamily. "There's magic in it!"

Hot little flames sprang in Ann's breast, and crept up till they scorched her throat and the base of her tongue. She turned away, sick with hatred of the evil thing that stole Chako's kind looks and caresses from her.

They pushed off, Ann with a long look at the little shack where she had been happy for three nights, and wretched for two. They left it as they had found it, with the bar in place. With its window, its door, and its chimney, it looked out on the river as with a grotesque, lopsided face, with one ear pricked. They passed around a bend, and left it forever in its strange isolation.

They went along with the current at a good rate, but Chako's impatience would not be satisfied. As in most streams of this sort, each rapid in its path formed a sort of dam, backing up the water behind it. Consequently their swift, brief descents alternated with long reaches of sluggish water, at which Chako continually grumbled. He busied himself with calculations of the distance they had to cover.

"I want to get to the cañon to-morrow night," he said, "so we can sleep on this side, and give a whole day to carrying our stuff across. Otherwise we'd have to sleep on one side while the gold was on the other."

"What harm could come to it?" asked Ann, between stiff and bitter lips.

Chako could not see her face.

"Why, none, I suppose," he said with a deprecating laugh; "but I couldn't sleep easy unless I had it beside me!"

The river never changed in character. It flowed smoothly between its low banks, which were covered with monotonous millions of pine trees. Indeed, the pines covered the whole valley as thick as hair. No part of this valley had ever been burned over; before themselves, so far as was known, there had been only one creature there who used fire.

The water was falling, and the strip of mud left bare under the banks was mantling itself with tender green grass. Chako measured their progress by their camping places on the way up.

They went ashore for their first spell at one of these former camping places. When they landed, Ann's eyes were free again to fly to Chako's face. She struggled in vain against the attraction. Hour by hour she had been aware of a progressive weakening in herself, but she could not help it. Her will was like water. She was conscious only of a great ache.

When they had finished eating, and sat awhile to rest, as was customary, she could stand it no longer. Were they not engaged to be married, as Chako said? Had she not some rights?

She frankly moved close to Chako's side. He was smoking. Slipping her hand under his arm, she dropped her cheek on his shoulder.

Chako wriggled impatiently.

"Aw, don't!" he muttered.

Ann quickly dropped his arm.

"Why?" she asked in a scarcely audible voice.

"I don't feel like it."

"Yesterday—"

"That was different. Yesterday I was laying off and resting—didn't have anything else on my mind. To-day we're traveling."

Ann's pride suddenly failed her altogether. Clinging to Chako, she lifted her face to him, exposing all her misery.

"Chako! Chako!" she stammered. "You must not treat me so! You must not shut yourself away from me, or it will kill me!"

Chako's face turned black.

"I won't be made to do a thing if I don't feel like it!" he said. "It only makes me stubborn. Cut it out!"

He shook her off, got up, and walked away. Ann lay on the ground with her face covered, wondering why she did not die.

Presently she heard him coming back. She sprang up, mad with eagerness. Her pride was in ruins. His face was an extraordinary study; exasperation, stubbornness, and cunning struggled there.

"Ah!" he muttered, as if he hated himself for saying it. "I shouldn't have spoken to you the way I did. I'm sorry, kid."

He dropped beside her. Ann silently flung her arms around him, and hid her face in his breast. Chako said no more, but held her, and clumsily patted her shoulder. She dared not look up. She knew what was in his face. She clung to him, because she could not help herself, but she knew she had not won anything. However, she had a few moments of exhausted peace.

"Come on—let's go now," Chako said.

As soon as they were afloat, Ann's torments recommenced.

"He didn't want to come back to me," she thought. "He forced himself to, because he was afraid of driving me too far, and that would interfere with his plans."

Hour after hour, as they paddled, she was forced to dwell with such thoughts; but in the very depths of her humiliation she found a slender foothold for her pride. Whatever might be in store for her, that particular kind of scene should not be repeated. She had learned a lesson. She knew for a certainty that she would die before ever she asked Chako for kindness.

In mid afternoon they spelled again. Chako regarded Ann uneasily. She kept her eyes to herself, and set about the cooking. As they had cut short their usual rest after the last spell, they were both tired, and after eating they prepared to make up the lost rest before going on the water again.

Ann threw herself down on the opposite side of the fire from Chako, and managed for the most part not to look at him. She

could not help seeing, however, that he was in an unusually thoughtful frame of mind. It was evident, too, that she was the subject of his thoughts, for he kept glancing at her covertly. Chako was but a clumsy plotter, and these glances filled Ann with disquiet. What was he up to now? The mere fact that he did not go to sleep was significant.

After a while he got into the canoe, and began rummaging through their slender belongings.

"What are you looking for?" Ann ventured to ask.

"Nothing," he said evasively.

He untied the bag of gold, and took out several of the smaller bags. Ann could not bear to see him at this game again. She got up and went away out of sight.

When she returned, Chako had put away the gold and tied up the bag. He was stretched out on the ground, on his stomach, with a little square of the pale green silk spread out on a paddle blade before him, and he was writing on it with the stub of a pencil.

Ann was astonished. *Writing!* What reason could he have for writing? To whom but herself could he be writing? Why should he write to her? Ann's sore and jealous heart burned up with curiosity, but she would not ask.

Chako, seeing her eyes upon him, folded up the piece of silk and slipped it into his shirt pocket with a highly self-conscious air.

After their last meal of the day, at sundown, there was always a period of relaxation by the fire. It is the best hour of the twenty-four, when there is amity in camp. On this night Chako sat with his back against a tree, smoking, while Ann, across the fire, nursed her knees and kept her head down, silent and still. She had weakened again. Slow drops of pain were being forced from her heart.

Surely now, with their day's work behind them, in the still and lonely evening under the red sky, he must soften a little toward her, he must speak! She clutched the rags of her pride desperately around her. *She* would not speak; but what if he presently got up with an indifferent yawn, and turned away to his blankets? How could she bear it?

But he did speak.

"Come over here, kid," he said in a rough, cajoling tone.

She got up and went slowly, intolerably shamed, her head hanging. He did not want her, and she knew it. He was just cajoling her. His look was not open.

He patted the ground beside him, and she dropped down. He flung an arm around her.

"That's better, isn't it?" he said. "That's comfy!"

Ann could scarcely draw breath, such was the pain she felt. She put her hand up, and clung like a drowning woman to the hand that came around her shoulder. Surely he must feel, through the nerves of her hand, what she suffered!

Apparently he did feel it, for he uneasily pulled his hand from under hers. He pretended that this was to give him freedom to pat Ann's shoulder. How she hated that patting—a hypocritical gesture!

Chako said, with a consciously reasonable air, not unmixed with jocosity:

"We got to take some thought about our future, kid. This getting married is no joke. I've seen marriages—Lord, the two of them pulling in different directions, like half broke dogs in sledge harness! We don't want to be like that, do we?"

"No," whispered Ann.

"I reckon there's got to be a head to every house," he went on. "I aim to be the head of my house. I couldn't stand for anything else. Are you willing?"

"Yes."

"That's fine! Now this business of the—you know, the stuff we got"—Chako was as shy as a lover of naming his treasure—"that's bound to make trouble between us unless we settle it beforehand. Isn't that right?"

"I suppose so."

"So I made out a little paper fixing it all up between us. At least it isn't a paper, for there wasn't any in the outfit, but it's the same thing."

This was the writing!

Taking his arm from around her, Chako produced the piece of silk from his pocket, and, spreading it open, held it up for Ann to read.

"This is for you to sign," he said.

Ann read:

I hereby give to my husband, George E. Lyllac, all the gold we found on the property of my father, Joseph Maury.

Within her Ann heard wild, cruel laughing and a deriding voice.

"Of course! Of course!" the voice said. "Just what was to be expected! You fool, not to have guessed it!"

Chako sprang up, leaving Ann sitting a little crumpled. Full of confidence, he got a paddle from the canoe, laid it across her knees, and carefully smoothed the piece of silk upon it.

"Sign there," he said, pointing.

Ann took the stubby pencil he offered her, and put her hand to the place. Chako's sparkling eyes were fixed on her hand; but it did not write. It rested motionless for so long that he looked sharply in her face, which showed the stress of internal conflict.

"What's the matter?" demanded Chako. Ann dropped the pencil.

"I cannot!" she whispered. "Not that!"

Chako was instantly enraged.

"Why not?"

"It's a sordid bargain."

"Sure it's a bargain!" he cried. "I put in the word 'husband' to bind myself. If I don't marry you, it doesn't hold."

"Oh, I understand that!"

"Then sign!" he said, offering the pencil again.

With a nervous gesture, Ann pushed the paddle away. Chako retrieved the fluttering piece of silk. Ann got to her feet, and essayed to walk away with firmness, but her legs gave way under her, and down she went without a sound.

She lay still, with her head between her arms. She had not fainted. No such mercy was vouchsafed her. She was fully conscious of her pain. No cries, no tears, came to ease her breast.

Chako, a little alarmed by her stillness, cried harshly:

"What's the matter with you? This is only play acting! Can't you act like a reasonable woman?"

She did not answer him, and he bent down to turn her over.

"Don't touch me!" Ann whispered sharply. "I'll be all right in a moment."

"What do you think I am?" Chako cried in his rage. "Do you think I'm going to tie myself up to a woman who holds the purse, and makes me jump through hoops to get a dollar? Not on your life! I'm not getting married for nothing! Marriage is a sacrifice, to a man like me. If I've got to shut myself up in a house, I'm going to be the boss of that house. No

woman is going to tell me how much I can spend for my own good!"

"Oh, don't!" murmured Ann. "I know all this."

"Then sign!" he shouted.

"I'd sooner die!"

Chako abandoned himself to rage.

"Oh, I know the kind of woman you are!" he shouted. "I've seen it from the first! It's rule or ruin with you! You want a man well broke, don't you? You want to keep your hands on your money, and your foot on my neck! Well, not for me! Not for me! *No, thanks!*"

There was much more of this.

Under the storm of Chako's rage, Ann came out of her daze. She finally sat up, oddly composed. She had recovered her human dignity. The storm continued to beat about her ears, but it seemed remote. She knew so well the sort of thing Chako would say that she didn't have to listen. Besides, it didn't matter.

"It's all over," she thought. "You've been through hell, and somehow climbed out on the other side. Nothing can touch you now!"

She got up and went for her blanket roll. She walked steadily.

Her self-possession infuriated Chako. He planted himself in her path.

"Do you think I'll marry you now?" he shouted.

"No," said Ann.

She walked around him and laid her blankets down a little way off. Chako stared after her, speechless with rage.

Ann, lying wrapped in her blankets, gazing up at the stars, felt a sort of weary peace after her stormy days. She had lost him for good now—she had no illusions about that; but the thing was *decided*. No more reason to torment herself!

She stared wide-eyed and unafraid down the gray and ashy vista of the future. All right—she still had her little spring of comfort. In the final trial she had somehow found the strength to stand fast. She had been true to herself. Thus she had escaped the very worst thing in life.

She slept.

XXIV

In the morning it was clear that Chako had not slept much. He had had rage for his bedfellow, and she had left the marks of her claws. Ann saw his face as it would appear when time had permanently

smudged its youthful brilliancy—the eyes a little sunken, and ugly lines between nose and mouth. His eyes had the same look of balked fury that they had shown while he was engaged on his fruitless hunt for the gold—with this difference, that now he had an object to vent his fury on, and that was Ann.

Ann had expected nothing else. In order to keep the peace as far as possible, she remained away from the fire until he had cooked and eaten his breakfast. Then she ate what was left. She did not require much.

They did not speak. Another man would have taken pains to veil the baleful fires in his eyes; but not so Chako. His rage and hatred blazed out nakedly. His eyes followed Ann wherever she moved, as if they would destroy her with their glances.

It was difficult for her to maintain her self-possession under such espionage. In spite of herself, the poison of his glance infected her. She was dismayed by the mere existence of such virulence.

In making their preparations for departure, they moved in circles, in order to give each other a wide berth. Once they were afloat, Ann breathed more freely, though she was conscious of that glance still fixed on her back.

That was a strange, silent journey down the river. In the rapids Ann was obliged to watch close and strive her hardest, for Chako would not now tell her what to do. More than once they were in difficulties in the rapids, through lack of efficient team work.

Chako remained mum throughout. His rage was too deep to find any vent in abuse. In the sluggish reaches they drove their paddles hard into the sullenly resisting water. Both were possessed by a fever to get on.

Upon this morning the beauty of the changing river vistas, the beaming sky, the noble trees, had no message for Ann. She felt numb inside—neither glad nor sorry, neither interested nor bored—not exactly dead, nor altogether alive. The way did not seem long. One reach after another, it was all the same. She realized, with a little feeling of dread, that some time soon she would have to take up the painful business of feeling again.

When they landed for their first spell, the situation was unchanged.

"I'll cook," said Ann.

Chako shrugged.

"Cook enough to last the rest of the day," he said harshly. "I don't mean to spell again until we get to the cañon."

During the tedious business of baking the biscuit, he took himself off out of sight.

When they had eaten, Chako remained sitting glumly. He had no appetite for his pipe to-day. Ann cleaned up without any help from him.

Glancing at him covertly, the realization suddenly came to her that a man might make himself hard and brutal, yet suffer the torments of the damned, too—that, in fact, such men *were* the damned. Behind Chako's cruel, savage mask she perceived an unspeakable wretchedness, and her heart melted. She began to feel again, but the warm tide had a healing effect.

She loved him! It was useless to deny it to herself. She must love him till she died. Whether he were bad or good had nothing to do with it. It was himself she loved, not his qualities. If he had resolved to be evil and wicked, he needed love so much the more.

She could never expect anything from him. No matter—she must love him just the same. How she could love him if he would only let her! But it must be upon the terms of self-respect. There could be no weakening there.

Chako's eyes were bloodshot, his lips compressed into a harsh and bitter mold of pain. Because she loved him, Ann was endowed with a certain second sight where he was concerned. She saw that he was writhing in a perfect hell of rage. That it was a hell of his own creation made it none the less painful.

What a lot of pain for a smallish bag of gold! Surely, if he possessed it, he would realize how little it was worth. It was visibly destroying him to be deprived of it, so it could do him no worse harm to let him have it.

"Chako," she said quietly.

His eyes bolted. He snarled at her.

"Have you got that thing you wanted me to sign?"

"No. What of it?" he muttered, sharply arrested.

"Well, you can make out another, I suppose," said Ann. "If you'll change it a little, I'll sign it."

Chako bent an extraordinary look of incredulity and suspicion on her.

"I don't know that I want you to sign it now," he muttered.

"Change it a little," said Ann. "Leave out the words 'her husband.'"

"What are you getting at now?" he demanded.

"I'm willing you should have the gold," said Ann; "but I don't want to marry you."

Chako sprang up. His face was convulsed, his voice breaking with rage.

"What do you think I am?" he cried. "Do you think I'd take it from you? Do you think I'd take it from you as a gift, when it's mine by right? You think you're putting it all over me, don't you? Makes you feel fine, doesn't it, to give it away so grandly? You're always trying to make out that I'm a sort of low hound, a poor worm that it's scarcely worth your while to step on. Well, I'm sick of it! You know damned well you're safe in offering it to me! You make me mad! Don't speak to me any more!"

He plunged blindly away among the trees. Ann was left sitting there, aghast and white-faced, stunned by his unexpected outburst of indignation. Who could have foreseen this?

But she reflected, and dimly she began to understand. A strange joy stirred in her—in her, who had put joy aside forever. Her intuition told her that it was something noble in Chako that found her offer so intolerable. A mean nature would have snatched at it. It was his better self, aware of having treated her badly, that was driven mad by her generosity.

The voice of intuition whispered to her that a hatred so violent and unprovoked was akin to love. Perhaps, after all, he loved her in his own fashion.

She did not deceive herself. She saw clearly that the stubborn Chako would bring down ruin on both their heads sooner than confess himself to her; but she thought, with a grave smile, that she could go to destruction with him willingly enough if she knew he loved her.

Chako was a long while gone. When he came back, Ann saw that he had recovered a sort of composure. His face was no less hard and cruel, but his eyes were quiet, almost sleepy-looking. They shot out glances at her sidewise. It was a new look—a wicked look. His lips, so tightly compressed before, were now full and red, and slightly parted in a sensual smile.

"He has made up his mind to kill me," Ann thought.

A great thrill shook her—not a thrill of fear. She was not afraid. She exulted in it.

"It is not so hard to die," she thought. "I shall not shame myself in dying."

She looked around at the river, trees, and sky, with a sharp pang for the beauty of the world; but it was not fear.

"Shall we go?" suggested Chako. "We've got a long way to paddle."

The purring note had returned to his deep voice. A sinister humor seemed to play about his lips.

At this camping place the low bank was cut away sharply, and the canoe floated in sufficient water alongside, tied to a tree. In such a place they could embark without pushing off. Chako got in first.

"Hop in," he said, holding the canoe to the bank.

He was still smiling, but his sleepy eyes were deadly. Ann's heart beat madly. Chako's look at her was much the same as if he had been looking forward to embracing her—a rapt look. That was what set her heart off; but yet it was just a little different, too.

Ann saw his rifle lying on the baggage immediately in front of him, and hesitated. She could die, but she desired to face her death. If he was going to shoot her, she must be looking at him. That would be her all-sufficient revenge—that last look.

"I'm not going to paddle," she said, with a firmness that surprised herself. "I will sit in the bottom."

Chako's devilish assurance was upset. He scowled.

"We've only done one trick."

"I don't care," said Ann. "I'm tired. It's downstream work."

She got in, facing him.

"Well, turn around the other way," he snarled.

"I prefer to sit this way," said Ann, proudly meeting his glance.

Chako's eyes trailed away across the river. With a vicious shove against the bank, he started the canoe moving.

In his rage, Chako no longer reminded Ann of the lover, and a healthy instinct of self-preservation asserted itself in her. His cruel lust to kill her had precious little to do with love; it was a mere sickness of the fancy to regard it so. There was that obese little bag of gold squatting in the canoe between them. *That* was what he meant to kill her for.

Things had better be faced. He wouldn't let her give him the gold, but he could kill her to get possession of it. Such were men!

Her swift thoughts raced, and doubled back, and started off again. She would have little enough time for thinking!

It was not so simple as all that. One must try to be fair, even to one's murderer. He loved her with the better part of him, and the gold with the baser part. The pull of the gold was stronger; he had given himself to the gold. Therefore the mere existence of Ann had become a reproach to him. He was going to kill her, not because the gold was hers, but because he could not give himself wholly to it while Ann lived.

Her rival, thought Ann, with the hint of a twisted smile in the direction of the thick bag squatting there, toadlike and obscene, half covered with their spare clothes. Ann might break her heart to win him. The gold did nothing—it just existed; yet it had taken him from her. Its earthy glitter was more potent than her eyes—the windows of the soul, they called them.

What a mockery! How loathsome that a bag of yellow sand should be endowed with such a power! The sight of it suddenly afflicted her with a nausea. She looked wildly up at the sky, the trees. Strange how, at such a moment, each separate tree out of all those thousands impressed its beauty on her! The little, light, shining clouds in the zenith seemed different from any clouds she had ever seen in her life before, and touchingly beautiful.

She glanced at Chako again. He was looking over her head at his course downstream. A slight change of expression when Ann looked at him showed that he was aware of her glance, but his gaze never deviated. His eyes were narrowed, and hard as a wolf's. In his hate and hardness, he was still splendid to look at; yet beauty was truth, and truth beauty!

How strange that a man should be so bent on killing that which loved him best! Some other poet had remarked on that. Would she ever open another book of poetry? Ah, how careless of beauty she had been! If she could only seize it all in one moment before she died!

But such thoughts were slightly morbid. Better for her to be thinking how she could save herself. Surely there must be a right thing for her to say—a thing that would turn Chako from his purpose! If she could

but find it! Surely, if she showed him how well she understood him and sympathized with him, even in his murderous promptings, he could not kill her!

But at that thought she smiled in self-scorn. When a man did not understand himself, how could she begin to explain that she understood him? In his eyes it would be an added offense. At the first word he would snatch up the gun in a fury and blow the top of her head off, grateful for the excuse to do so.

Any word she uttered would be likely to anger him. If she could avoid angering him, he would hardly shoot her while they sat there face to face. In that case she was safe until nightfall—unless he changed his mind and went ashore again.

At nightfall—then would come her difficult time! And even supposing she succeeded in staying awake this night, there would be to-morrow night, and every night until they got out to an inhabited land.

At the thought of the friendly land, of home and smiling neighbors and children, a breathless pain stabbed Ann's breast. A horrible, insidious weakness pulled her down. She ground her teeth, and hard sobs caught her by the throat. She sat there desperately struggling with herself, well aware that the first sob, the first tear, would mean her instant death.

When she finally got the better of it, a long sigh escaped her. She slipped down, a little faint with weariness.

Ann had her blanket roll behind her back. She slipped down a little farther, and, resting her head against it, flung an arm over her eyes. From under her arm she watched Chako. He only looked at her once, his eyes darting little snakes' tongues of hatred. As if he suspected that she might be watching him, he quickly shifted his glance, and it did not return.

Useless to look at him! There was no chance of his relenting. His implacable face bruised her. She covered her eyes in earnest, and her thoughts flew on.

A long time passed.

Suddenly Ann realized that Chako had stopped paddling. She sat bolt upright, and her body went cold. He was in the act of picking up his gun. His face was white, his forehead was furrowed with intensity, his eyes were fixed on her. As soon as she moved, his glance flew away, but she had seen it.

He threw the rifle to his shoulder, and

pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot crashed among the trees.

"A moose," he said. "I missed him."

But there was no sound of any animal pounding away.

"Fresh meat would be welcome," said Ann, turning to peer among the trees in the direction in which he had aimed.

She dared not look at Chako.

"If he suspects that I have guessed his intention, it is all up with me!" she thought.

A dreadful silence fell between them. Ann, with held breath, listened for the click of the reloading. She dared not turn back at once. To have looked at him would have revealed her fatal knowledge. She had to say something that would give him no clew.

"How long is it going to take us to get out?" she murmured carelessly.

Chako did not answer immediately, and this gave Ann time to look at him in a natural way. He was taking up the paddle again. The blood had rushed to his pale face, giving it a swollen look. His eyes were terrible with rage and pain and frustration. Aware of Ann's eyes on him, he muttered in a thick, slurred voice:

"Oh, twelve or fourteen days."

The danger was past for the moment. Ann relaxed, and began to shake. She clenched her teeth, and concealed her hands under her. She smiled a little. She repeated rimes of her childhood over and over to herself, in a desperate effort to control that treacherous weakness of the flesh. Gradually the shaking passed.

So time went on. Ann could not be sure that she had persuaded Chako of her ignorance, but she felt that a single additional word would bring down the catastrophe. She sat there, quietly facing the frenzied man with the loaded express rifle at his knee. It was not so difficult to nerve one's self up to face a brief, dreadful moment, but this nerve-wracking tension had to go on for hour after hour.

What gave her strength was the certain knowledge that if she weakened by ever so little, if she wept or pleaded, it would drive the man completely beside himself. It would supply just the fillip he needed to enable him to snatch up the gun and fire at her point-blank. The only moments she could relax were when they went down a rapid. Then Chako's attention was fully occupied.

(To be concluded in the June number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE LYRIC BOUGH

THE burgeoned bough is lyric now,
And so, my gypsy heart, be gay!
Let us twain take the sylvan vow,
And wander down the woodland way!

The maple sows its seeds of song
On fragrant airs that shift and shine;
Blithe raptures to the birch belong,
And ecstasies breathe from the pine.

Our ears shall hear the hickory sing
The olden twang tune of the bow;
The laurel will keep murmuring
Of Daphne, and of long ago.

No branching bole will there be mute,
For joy will throb and thrill within;
And we shall list the lover's lute,
The pleading of the violin.

Then up, my gypsy heart, be gay!
Let us twain take the sylvan vow,
And wander down the woodland way,
Where every bough is lyric now!

Clinton Scollard

Mixed Breed

THE STORY OF BRAN, THE BIG SHEEP DOG, IN WHOSE BLOOD
WARRING STRAINS CONTENDED FOR MASTERY

By Charles G. D. Roberts

GHOSTLY white under the flooding spring moonlight, the sheep lay contentedly ruminating amid the old stumps and close-bitten hillocks of the upland pasture. A huge black-and-tan dog—long-limbed, deep-chested, with longish, slightly waving coat and richly feathered tail, like a collie's—came trotting up toward them with a businesslike air. At a distance of some ten paces he paused, and, contemplatively waving his tail, cast a keen glance over the flock.

The nearest ewes stopped chewing and eyed him with a mild disfavor, prepared to rise and move in among their fellows if he should come any closer. The rest of the flock appeared to ignore him. They did not fear him. In fact, his presence gave them a sense of added security, there in this wide, naked pasture field with the blackness of the ancient, untamed forest crowding close along the frail barrier of zigzag rail fence. In a dim way they realized that he was responsible for their safety—that he was their protector from the perils which prowled or lurked in the forest shades.

Of his powers as a protector they had a keen appreciation; but in those very powers their deeper instincts recognized something from which they shrank uneasily. Ancestral memories, formless and infinitely remote, kept them on their guard, and their noncommittal eyes, lazily half closed, followed his every movement as long as he was near them.

Apparently satisfied with his inspection, the big dog skirted the flock at a brisk trot and ran on to the fence. Here he sniffed along the rails for perhaps a couple of hundred yards in each direction, occasionally thrusting his muzzle through them, between the roughly split poles, and sampling the forest smells with his discriminating nostrils.

The soft night wind drew outward from the forest, across the pasture, and brought him a mixture of savors, all of which his delicate sense sorted out unerringly. He smelled the balsamy tang of spruce and fir, the faint wintergreen breath of the birches, the harsh, chill earthiness from a near-by patch of alder swamp. He caught the almost imperceptible scent of a hare, passing at some distance behind the trees, and cocked an ear of interest as it was followed, almost at once, by the pungent musk of a fox. Then his nose wrinkled at the taint of a passing weasel.

There was no sign or hint anywhere of danger to the flock. He was not anticipating danger, indeed; for the bears and lynxes, at this season of plenty and good hunting, were not hanging about the neighborhood of the settlements and courting trouble with the quick-shooting backwoods farmers.

Having thus fulfilled his duty toward his master's flock, Bran—for that was the big dog's name—continued on along the fence, absorbed in his own private affairs. He was smelling for rabbits, or weasels, or ground squirrels, or any creature alive and active—skunks and porcupines alone strictly barred—which might afford him some sport and ease a certain restless craving that was tormenting him.

He had gone but a few yards when he picked up the fresh trail of a rabbit. Bounding forward eagerly, he dashed around a dense clump of juniper—and almost collided with a ewe who was standing over her newborn lamb.

On the instant, the dauntless mother charged at him furiously, with lowered head—so swiftly that, as he sprang aside, she caught him a savage butt on the hind quarters, nearly knocking him over. With a

snarl of surprise and wrath he leaped out of reach; and the ewe, returning to her little one, fell to licking it anxiously. It was just old enough to stand upon its awkward, trembling legs; and she stood over it, alternately coaxing it to nurse and stamping defiantly at Bran.

II

As for Bran, his first impulse had been to spring upon his assailant; but his deepest instincts forbade him. To harm her was unlawful. She was part of his master's property, and, as such, sacred. At a discreet distance—the rabbit trail forgotten—he sat up on his haunches and regarded her.

In themselves, the ewe and her ridiculous offspring were of less than no concern to him; but his deep sense of responsibility for his master's property made him uneasy at seeing her so close to the fence and the forest. He knew that sheep were fools, of course; but she might have had sense enough to establish her nursery somewhere behind a big stump well down in the pasture, where her helpless young would not be a temptation to every forest marauder.

He would have liked to drive them both back to the flock, or at least to a safe distance from the fence; but he knew that the foolish and excited mother was in no mood to take a hint. Further, it was obvious that the lamb was as yet too feeble to walk. Unable to make up his mind what to do, he turned his back upon the problem, and sat watching the flock, his fine tail spread, slack and dejected, upon the dewy turf.

Obviously a mongrel, Bran was, like many mongrels, an altogether magnificent specimen of doghood. Fine breeds had gone to his making. His mother had been a big Yukon sledge dog, part Husky, part Newfoundland, with a strong strain of the wolf quite near the surface. His father had been a cross between collie and Airedale; and an expert might have picked out marks of all these strong strains in his physical make-up, although the blend was perfect, unless, perhaps, for some contrast between the intelligent, benevolent breadth of his skull above the eyes, and the wolfish rake of his long, powerful jaws.

Heredity plays some queer tricks, no less in dogs than in men; and in Bran's temperament the distinctive traits of his varied ancestry lay in tangled and often sharply conflicting strands, instead of being wrought into a harmonious whole.

Now, balked in his hunting and in a distinctly bad humor, the expression in his eyes, as he sat watching the peaceful flock among the moonlit hillocks and stumps, grew to be something far from benevolent. Little by little his lips drew back, disclosing his long, white fangs.

Stealthily, almost imperceptibly to himself, a savage impulse began to creep up, itching, into his brain. He felt presently a fierce craving to dash down among the silly, comfortable flock, and scatter them—to see them fleeing in wild terror before him—to slash at their tender, woolly throats—to feel the gush of their hot, sweet blood upon his tongue. Even so would that ancestral timber wolf have felt, watching, from behind a bush in the Yukon wilds, the approach of an unsuspecting little herd of caribou.

But Bran never moved. A more dominant strain in his temperament woke up, and called him sharply to his senses. His fangs vanished from view. The greenish fire faded from his eyes. A sense of shame chilled his spirit. With a guilty air he rose and turned to trot back to the farmyard, his impulse to slaughter even rabbits quite extinguished for the moment.

III

He had not gone far, however, on his homeward journey, when he was surprised to hear from behind him that dull, pattering rush which is the unmistakable sound of a flock of sheep stampeding. His flock, so quiet but a half minute before, were tearing across the pasture in wild panic, now scattering hither and thither in small bunches, now closing again into a huddled mob as they ran, only to be scattered apart again instantly, as if by an explosion in their midst.

In the trail of the flight he saw two sheep down on their sides, kicking feebly. In the broad white flood of the moonlight he saw clearly that their throats were torn out. He ran toward them, but, for the moment, he ran slowly, in bewilderment and indecision. The scene was just his own savage dream of five minutes back come true, and his conscience shook him.

Then he saw the slayer—a tall, slender, bluish gray dog, a half-breed greyhound from the next settlement, miles away on the other side of the ridge. The stranger was just emerging from the confusion, having succeeded in cutting out an unhappy

ewe and heading off her frantic efforts to rejoin her fellows.

On the instant Bran's perceptions cleared. The thick mane along his neck lifted with rage, and a deep growl rumbled in his throat, as he launched himself at top speed across the hillocks. The gray marauder was too much engrossed to see the approaching peril. He was delaying his victim's fate, heading her off ever farther from the flock, playing with her anguish of terror as a cat plays with a mouse.

At length, tiring of this play, and fearful lest the rest of the flock should escape him, he sprang in, with the sure aim of the practiced killer. The helpless ewe gave one shrill bleat of despair. Then her throat was torn open, and she went down beneath her slayer—just as Bran landed upon them like a thunderbolt.

The black-and-tan dog felt a gush of hot blood in his face and nostrils; and then his long jaws closed inexorably upon the side of the gray beast's throat as he jerked him off his prey.

It was in no sense a fight, this that followed. Bran, the heavier and stronger as well as the more savage, had secured the one perfect, absolutely fatal grip. His opponent could do nothing but struggle impotently, with choked gaspings and gurglings, striving to keep his feet while Bran worried him like a rat. In half a minute he was down, all four feet in the air, curled together and pawing convulsively; and then in a few seconds his body straightened out and fell slack.

For a little while, with fiercer growls, Bran continued to worry the unresisting form. Then, scornfully dropping it from his jaws, he lifted his blood-stained head and glanced about him keenly. Except for the three slaughtered ewes, the flock was all together, huddled in a compact, trembling white mass at the farther side of the pasture, as far as possible from the forest and its terrors.

Feeling that he had fulfilled his duty to the utmost, Bran turned about and with his hind paws contemptuously kicked a few scraps of turf over his victim. Then he trotted home to the farmyard, crept into his kennel, and settled himself to sleep.

IV

It was not out of love for his master, by any means, that Bran was so careful to guard that master's property. It was sim-

ply a fundamental article of the code which he inherited from the Newfoundland and collie side of his ancestry. Ben Parsons, the big, red-faced, hard-eyed farmer, was his master. To Ben Parsons he owed his food, his shelter, and therefore his loyal service. That was enough for Bran.

There was no question of love, or even of the most temperate liking. Ben Parsons was not one to inspire, or to desire, anything approaching affection in man or beast. All the stock on his farm feared and distrusted him, in spite of the fact that they were in the main well treated. He had too clear an understanding of his own interests not to know that good treatment secured him good value. From his hired help he got fair service, for which he gave fair pay in wage and keep, and so he prospered; but no one ever stayed long in his employ.

From Bran he got obedience, but no servility. To him the great inscrutable-eyed, huge-eating dog was well worth his rations and the ten dollars that Ben had paid for him as a puppy, for the protection which he afforded to the farm.

It was toward noon when Parsons tramped up to the sheep pasture to see if all was well with his flock, a bunch of high-grade South Downs in which he took much pride. Bran accompanied him, not trotting at his heels, but ranging about with an air of responsibility.

The flock was pasturing—contentedly, for sheep have short memories—near the home fence of the pasture. The ewe which had given birth to her lamb the night before had rejoined the flock with her gawky offspring; but the owner's eye was quick to notice that three were missing. He glanced about the field.

"Seek 'em!" he said sharply.

Bran pricked up his ears, eyed Parsons inquiringly for a moment, then led him straight to the little hollow behind a big gray stump where one of the victims was lying.

To Parsons the sight of the torn throat was instant evidence that here was the work of that most hated of marauders, a sheep-killing dog. There could be no doubt as to who was the culprit. Bran was the only big dog in the whole settlement, the only dog with dangerous blood in his veins.

He turned and looked at Bran, a deadly rage seething in his heart and gleaming from his steel-hard eyes. Bran, on the other side of the carcass, sniffed at it for a

moment, and growled and bared his fangs as he thought of the other dog.

Had Ben Parsons had his gun with him, Bran's fate would have been settled on the spot; but he had not even a stick. His big fingers clenched viciously, but he was no fool. He was not going to tackle a mighty beast like Bran naked-handed. He controlled himself, and planned vengeance later—a safe vengeance. Bran should be disabled by a well placed shot, and then beaten to death, without haste. The matter could wait.

Bran looked up and met his master's eyes with the confident gaze of a commending conscience; but as he sensed the hate, the deadly purpose, in those cold blue eyes, his own underwent a change, and an angry green light flickered in their depths.

But habit, training, the master instinct, conquered. He turned and trotted straight to the other victim. Parsons followed, and gave but one look, icy now with the rage that was forced to bide its time. Hardly pausing, Bran led him on to the third victim, with the torn gray body of its slayer lying stretched out beside it. With a gesture of unutterable scorn, Bran kicked some dirt upon the corpse, then moved off a few paces, sat up on his haunches, and glared at his master with an expression of smoldering hostility.

Ben Parsons stared down upon that gaunt and long-jawed corpse, so terribly mauled, and understood the whole situation. There was no spark of generous warmth in his make-up. Even while congratulating himself that he had not perpetrated the folly of killing such a valuable dog as Bran, he nursed a certain grudge against him for not having intervened more promptly. He dwelt more on the three sheep slain than on the rest of the flock saved.

He set off for the stables, to get a horse and drag, in order to haul the carcasses home—the sheep to be skinned, the dog as evidence in his claim for damages. As he went, he whistled Bran to follow him; but the black-and-tan, apparently, failed to hear the summons. He was already far up the pasture, sniffing along beside the fence for the scent of a rabbit. He had no use for Ben Parsons at the moment.

V

THAT same night, just before moonrise, Bran came forth from his kennel and stood surveying the wide, shadowy farmyard, the

two big, square barns black against the glimmering sky, the long, low, open-fronted shed for wood and carts, the lean, white-painted frame house, the lamp-lit kitchen window close shut against the sweet and mild spring air.

Conflicting impulses warred sharply in his blood. For all the comfortable scene he felt a warm affection—a certain sense of proprietorship, almost, because he was there to guard it from the unknown perils of the night. He heard the two heavy bay draft horses pawing gently as they nosed the fodder in their mangers. They were Bran's friends, and his heart went out to them. He heard the soft lowing of one of the cows in the home pasture behind the shed. He liked the cattle—dull, to be sure, but rather amiable!

In his veins; however, there was stirring a fever that would not be quenched. Into his mouth came again the thrilling taste of that gush of hot blood from the ewe's torn throat as he had closed with her slayer. He licked his lips and gave an uneasy whine.

At that moment the heavy figure of Ben Parsons, pipe in mouth, appeared between the window and the lamp, gazing out into the dusk. Bran growled softly, with sudden aversion, at the sight; and the wolf strain triumphed. He trotted off toward the forest, athirst to hunt something, to kill something, if only a rabbit. In reality he craved a quarry that would struggle, that would resist, that he could slake his blood lust upon. If only he might strike the trail of one of those splendid red deer which he had occasionally seen staring over the pasture fence!

His way to the forest led him up through the sheep pasture. The moon was just rising, red and distorted, through the jagged black tops of the fir trees on the ridge, casting long, sinister shadows across the hillocks. The sheep were lying down. He merely glanced at them in passing, for just now he had no mind to look after their protection.

In that moment the picture of the long-limbed gray slayer, as he scattered and tore the flock in the ecstasy of the chase, flashed across Bran's memory. His jaws slavered with a gust of horrid sympathy and understanding. He realized at last that it was *sheep* he wanted to kill; but not, assuredly not, *these* sheep! These sheep he had fought for. They were his own. Let any intruder touch them at his peril!

He trotted straight on, then broke into a run, leaped the fence, and plunged into the forest. His purpose was now clear to him, and nothing should turn him from it!

In the woods it was dark, except where the low moon sent long fingers of elvish radiance between the black trunks and down the silent glades. To Bran, going swiftly and without any thought of secrecy or stealth, the solitude seemed empty of all life; for all the furtive creatures of the wild, the savage and the timorous alike, hid themselves or froze into invisibility at the approach of this redoubtable intruder, who carried with him the added prestige of his alliance with man.

From time to time the scent of some tempting quarry would catch Bran's nostrils, but he was too fixed upon his purpose to be tempted. He raced on steadily, swishing through the young green brakes, crashing over the low blueberry bushes, skirting the denser thickets, threading the ancient trunks, leaping the occasional windfalls—his long and tireless gallop eating up the miles without effort. He topped the naked granite crest of the divide, spectral white in the pour of the new high-floating moon; and swept on down, through whispering groves of young birch and silver poplar, into the bosom of the wide Ottanoonsis Valley.

Bran knew of a spacious sheep pasture on the lower slopes, where dwelt a white-fleeced flock which had lately been guarded by a certain tall, gray-blue dog, very swift of foot but fatally lacking in judgment. That dog had trespassed, and murdered, and met his deserts. To Bran it seemed that there would be a measure of justice, of retaliatory vengeance, in visiting the slayer's crime upon the slayer's own charges.

But Bran was prudent, for all the deadly lust in his veins. The old guardian was dead, indeed, but already a new one might have been appointed; and he did not wish to be disturbed in the orgy he was promising himself. The new guardian of the flock, if there were one, must first be settled with. And then—and then—the ecstasy of the chase, the slaughter, and the slaking of his fiery thirst!

Through the rough rail fence he scrutinized, long and warily, the empty, bright expanse of the pasture, and the flock huddled, peacefully ruminating, beneath the glassy radiance in a remote corner of the field. Warily, keeping ever in the shadows, he

made a complete circuit of the field, a systematic reconnaissance.

It was about three o'clock in the morning. All was clear. All was quiet. The farmhouse and the farmyard, hidden behind a windbreak of dense fir trees, gave no sign of life. In the single straggling street of the settlement village, half a mile below, not a window was lighted. There was not a sound on the air but the soft rush of the Ottanoonsis against the two piers of its wooden bridge.

VI

WITH savage exultation Bran leaped the fence and dashed upon the flock.

For the moment he did no killing. He was not yet quite worked up to it. He craved the fierce excitement of the chase; and for a few seconds the flock, too astonished to be really frightened, merely scattered sluggishly to avoid him. Two or three he nipped severely. Their sudden, piteous bleats were not to be misunderstood. Then swift panic seized the flock, and they ran, frantically.

The young lambs, left sprawling and bleating behind, Bran ignored. They were too petty game for him. Moreover, he would not have touched them in any case. His murder lust could not carry him so low as that. He pranced among them wildly for a moment, just to give the quarry a start, and then, with bared fangs and eyes flaming green, he tore in pursuit.

The first that he overtook, a heavy ewe, he sprang upon like a wolf. Her knees gave way beneath her, her outstretched muzzle buried itself in the damp turf—and Bran tore her throat out as he had seen the gray dog do.

And then a strange thing happened to him. Instead of the ecstasy of gratifying a mad craving, the taste of his victim's blood shocked him back to sanity. It was like a douche of iced water in his face. He stood rigid, frozen, and stared about him like one awaking from a tremendous dream. That old wolf forebear of his had at last been glutted. The mad fire faded from his eyes. His fine tail drooped slowly, and at last went fairly between his legs, as a sense of intolerable and unpardonable guilt swept over him.

With that sense of guilt came fear, which he had never known before. He had cut himself off from man. Retribution would await him everywhere. Never again could

he return to the old farm. He whipped about and fled as if a pack of devils were at his heels.

Just at this moment, from behind the fir grove, appeared the farmer, the owner of the flock. Aroused, too late, by the vague but prolonged commotion in the sheep pasture, he had seized his gun—which hung, ready loaded, on the kitchen wall—and run out to see what was the matter. Grasping the whole situation at a glance in that revealing white light, he took a hasty shot at the fleeing Bran.

It was not a good shot, fortunately. One of the big scattering pellets alone caught Bran, with a sting like hot iron, on the side of the rump, just as he disappeared, with a startled yelp, over the top of the fence.

Speechless with indignation, the farmer strode across the field and surveyed the torn victim and the panic-stricken flock. The backwoods vocabulary is rich in varied and biting expletives; but words, here, were futile. He had recognized Bran, of course. He had already received an energetic demand from Ben Parsons for the price of three valuable sheep, their value being by no means understated in the claim.

"But I'll git even with Ben for this," he muttered at last; "him an' his dawg too, by God!"

Into the heart of the densest thicket he could find, trembling with shame and smarting from his surface wound, Bran slunk and hid himself. The spirit of two thousand generations of his ancestors—faithful friends of man since the dim ages of flint spearhead and cave-mouth fire—whispered scathingly in his conscience, upbraiding him for his crime.

He rolled and rooted in the wet moss and moist earth, striving to cleanse himself of the blood taint which now he loathed. The smart of his wound he hardly troubled to assuage, though from time to time he would lick at it despondently. What to do, or where to go, he had for the time no notion whatever. He had become that saddest and most aimless of four-foot creatures, a masterless dog.

VII

At about half past eleven that same morning, in the shade of a wide-branched maple which overhung the river bank, Dave Stonor sat on a log smoking, and reading a shabby volume, while he waited for his ket-

tle to boil. His compact little woodsman's fire was built between two stones close by, well in the shadow, that it might burn the better.

At the edge of the water, some twenty-five yards away—for the river had fallen, and there was a strip of gravelly beach between the wooded bank and the dimpling current—the prow of his loaded canoe was drawn up. Halting at the settlement that morning to buy milk and fresh bread, he had heard all about Bran's raid on the sheep pasture. Both Bran and Bran's owner, Ben Parsons, he had long known by reputation, though his house was nearly forty miles farther up the Ottanoonsis; for in the backwoods the minutest affairs of every one are known and discussed for leagues about. It is almost as if each man's—and woman's—hairs were all numbered.

When, therefore, Dave Stonor saw a huge black-and-tan dog, with a splendid head, emerge cautiously from the bushes a little farther upstream, and slink, with a slight limp, down to the water's edge, he understood a great deal at once, and thought rapidly. He loved dogs. He knew Bran's pedigree. He had no liking for Ben Parsons. He had never owned a sheep. Bran's crime was more or less venial in his eyes.

The great dog drank greedily. Then he stood gazing across toward the opposite bank, as if making up his mind to swim over.

At this moment Dave Stonor intervened.

"Bran!" said he. "Come here!"

Bran jumped as if shot, turned his head to stare at the speaker, and seemed uncertain whether to plunge into the stream or dash back into the cover of the woods. He stared inquiringly at the smallish, motionless figure seated on the log. He met a pair of grayish brown eyes, kindly but very masterful, very compelling, fixed steadily upon him.

"Come here, Bran! Come here, I tell you!" repeated Stonor, more sharply.

There was something in that voice of authority, so assured, yet so subtly sympathetic, that poured balm upon Bran's sick and desolate spirit. It gave him confidence. It seemed to restore him to his forfeited fellowship with man. He had never heard a voice like that before.

He came slowly toward Stonor, but he came very humbly, his ears drooping, his fine tail between his legs. He expected punishment, but he came gladly.

As he approached, Stonor tossed him a lump of cold meat. With an apologetic glance, Bran bolted it gratefully. Then he crept to the man's knees.

"Lay down, you bloody murderer!" commanded Stonor.

The dog obeyed at once, comforted to feel that he had acquired a master. That master placed a moccasined foot gently on his back, rubbed his broad, intelligent head, and pulled his ears with a decisive roughness. Then, dropping his eyes to some lines in the well thumbed volume that he had been reading, he remarked with the backwoods drawl:

"Must 'a' took a damn big conscience to make a coward of a dawg like you!"

In reply, Bran gave a small whimper of gratitude. He had been pardoned, and accepted.

By this time the kettle was boiling, but Dave Stonor paid no attention to it. He was thinking hard. He had tired of the backwoods. He had made some money by his work in the lumber camps, and saved it. He was on his way down to the city, a hundred and fifty miles away. There he intended to take train across the continent,

and go North into the vast Yukon Territory, prospecting for gold.

Bran's life was forfeit. It would be absurd to regard him any longer as the property of Ben Parsons—who was no good anyhow. Bran should not die. He should go to the Yukon with Stonor. What a leader for his dog team! And what a friend and companion in the great solitudes!

Dave Stonor got up briskly, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, emptied the kettle, and scattered and beat out the fire.

"We're a mite too nigh the settlement here," he remarked to Bran, who hung close at his heels. "We'll git right on, an' stop fur grub a few miles farther down."

Rearranging the dunnage in the canoe to make place for his unlooked-for passenger, he made Bran get in and lie down; and he took the precaution to throw a blanket over him. Then he stepped delicately into the stern, seated himself, picked up his broad-bladed paddle, and started off downstream with mighty strokes.

"Lay still an' keep quiet!" he commanded sharply. "I'm taking you where there ain't no sheep, an' where there ain't going to be no temptation to backsliding!"

IN PRUNELLA'S GARDEN

Love came through the garden just at dawn,
In amethysts and velvet panoplied,
After the lovely little moon had gone.

The sunlight gathers cobwebs from the lawn;
I sit beneath a cherry tree and read;
But Love came through the garden just at dawn.

Around his feet the flying leaves were drawn—
The hearts that go wherever Love may lead.
After the lovely little moon had gone,

I watched the pansies, purple-tinted fawn—
The sleeping purple pansies fairies feed—
Till Love came through the garden just at dawn.

The summer sun is high, the lilies yawn;
A fairy tells a story to a seed:
"After the lovely little moon had gone,

The queen played chess, a cherry was a pawn.
Why is Prunella dreaming—why, indeed?
For Love came through the garden just at dawn,
After the lovely little moon had gone."

Mary Louise Mabie

The Burden of Proof

IT WAS A GOOD THEORY, AND THE RESULTS OF ITS TESTING
WERE CONCLUSIVE

By Robert J. Horton

THEY were seated before an open fire in the library, and Dr. Hornblatt was listening tolerantly to the discourse of his guest, Emmett Deil, who had dropped in for the week-end. Deil was always welcome, as much for the freshness of the arguments he brought with him as because of the fact that the two men had long been friends.

"I tell you, Hornblatt, crime is a condition of the mind, or the result of a combination of unfortunate circumstances," Deil was saying. "There's no excuse for it, and our methods of making the aggressor atone for his transgressions are wrong—absolutely futile!"

"Well, what are you going to do with a man who commits a crime?" asked Dr. Hornblatt, who was getting genuine enjoyment out of Deil's latest theme.

"Treat him," Deil responded emphatically. "Mental therapeutics. A criminal isn't smart—he's ignorant. This may sound egotistic, but I claim I have a far better brain than the average criminal—than *any* criminal who is not criminally insane. The latter class constitutes the only exception I will allow. Your criminal is merely an ignorant man, made more ignorant and vicious by the treatment which the authorities, from the government down to the policeman on the beat, accord him."

"I'll grant you're smarter than the average criminal," laughed Dr. Hornblatt. "The fact that you've never been in jail proves that!"

"Don't make a joke out of this thing," said Deil testily. "It's serious with me. For a long time I've been more or less of a psychologist, as you know; and I've found crime and its motives the most interesting study of all."

Deil peered seriously through his horn-

rimmed spectacles at the round, ruddy face of Hornblatt, adorned with a precise Vandyke, as affected by his profession. Deil was small in stature and features, energetic and serious. He was a professor in a normal school situated some fifty miles from the small city in which Dr. Hornblatt lived.

"I'm so taken with my theory that I'm going to prove my contentions in a way which will both startle and convince you," Deil continued, with a note of triumph in his tone. "No—not yet. I'm not going to tell you how I'm going to do this just yet. What I wish to impress upon you at the moment is my belief that the criminal is not a smart man, and that he can be diverted from his career of crime by a mind stronger than his own."

"In that connection you will certainly have to convince me," said Dr. Hornblatt, the look in his eyes hardening. "I've had some experience with malefactors. I've helped to put a lot of them in prison, where I believe they belong. Oh, I'll concede exceptions in the cases of youth, first offenses, and possible extenuating circumstances; but a man who has committed a series of crimes is an intolerable menace to society, because his mind cannot be diverted from the crime channel in which the trend of its thought runs. He literally *thinks* in crime. How, then, can he possibly avoid being the victim of his own delusions?"

"He could avoid them if he were shown how," insisted Deil; "but who will take the trouble to show him how? The judgment of the authorities is warped, since they have to show results in the alleged suppression of crime. To do this they must put offenders in prison. They want a criminal to remain a criminal. The average law enforcement body in a city of this size, for example, is narrow-minded and hidebound by poli-

tics. The human element doesn't enter into their considerations at all, and they are usually just as ignorant as the supposed criminal himself."

Dr. Hornblatt tossed his cigar end into the grate.

"Jove, Deil, your argument is getting radical! You don't mean to say we'd be better off if the men in the prisons were running loose?"

"Exactly," nodded Deil. "Just that—if those men were shown the error and futility of their ways and assisted back to a normal way of thinking."

"Impossible!" Dr. Hornblatt ejaculated. "It can't be done."

"It can't?" said Deil in a superior tone. "I claim it *can* be done. I propose to show you a concrete example of the prejudice and stupidity of the authorities, the inefficiency of their system, and the practicability of redeeming a man who has been incarcerated for a crime."

"Just how do you propose to show that?" Dr. Hornblatt inquired curiously.

"First, by committing a crime," said Deil impressively. "Next, by getting myself committed to the State penitentiary for the commission of that crime; third, by escaping from prison and taking with me a man who will thereafter lead the right kind of life, ceasing to follow his criminal bent."

Hornblatt stared at him.

"Deil, you're crazy," he said finally.

"That's the way with you fellows who are slaves to formulas," declared Deil. "A man gets a logical idea, and is ready to demonstrate its worth in a logical and convincing way, and you say he is crazy. It may interest you to know that I decided upon this experiment some time ago, to satisfy myself as well as any others who might feel concern in the matter."

"But your work at the school—you can't very well leave that," Hornblatt pointed out.

"I have been given leave of absence for a year, or two years, if necessary, to do some research work," replied Deil triumphantly. "I shall have plenty of time in which to conclude this experiment, and also to complete my research activities. No, I am absolutely resolved, Hornblatt, and I'm going through with it."

"What—what sort of a crime have you in mind to further your scheme?" asked Hornblatt.

"Robbery—not a very great robbery, to

be sure; but one sufficient to assure me of a prison sentence."

"Ah! Where had you planned that this drama would be enacted?"

"Right here in this town," Deil announced. "Oh, don't look horrified. I shall assume another name to prevent word of my unusual enterprise reaching the school authorities, and no one is familiar with my face here except yourself and your servant. I intend, of course, to take certain precautions which would be only natural for a man in my position."

"And those precautions?"

"We will make a plain statement of the facts and my purposes in writing," explained Deil. "We will sign this document, and you will be its custodian. In event of some unforeseen emergency, we would thus be able to prove that I had a scientific reason for my acts. This proof, presented to the Governor, or the parole board, or whoever looks after such matters, would secure me a pardon."

Hornblatt had been gazing at his friend in awe and fascination. Now he suddenly brought his palms down on the arms of his chair.

"I'll bet you a hundred dollars, Deil, that you'll have me taking that paper and your story to the Governor within three months, if you go through with this nonsense," he said with conviction.

"I accept the wager, doctor," smiled Deil. "In fact, the wager lends added zest to my undertaking. However, you must give me your solemn promise that you will in no way interfere with my plans."

"That I promise readily enough," said Hornblatt grimly. "This experiment, as you call it, it likely to do you a lot of good. If it'll knock some of those triangular ideas out of your head, it'll be worth while. I'll be ready any time you want to call upon me."

"Thank you," smiled Deil. "Your district court convenes next week. In less than a month I shall be a prisoner in the penitentiary!"

II

It was a little past midnight when Roger Kennell, an eminently respectable young merchant of Falls City, heard a noise in his dining room downstairs. Since he had but half an hour earlier closed the house, locked the outer doors, and turned off the lights, he knew that the presence of any

one on the lower floor meant an unauthorized intruder.

He tightened the cord of his bath robe, took an automatic pistol from an upper drawer of the dresser, cautioned his startled wife to silence, crept down the stairs, and flashed on the lights in the dining room.

Emmett Deil looked up from the few pieces of silver he had grouped on the dining room table to stare into the black, menacing bore of the pistol.

"Good evening," he said with a smile.

Kennell merely looked at him curiously. Then he frowned.

"So you're a burglar!" he commented.

"It would seem so," said Deil amiably.

Kennell frowned again. The thief was altogether too frank and polite.

"You intended to steal my silver," he accused.

"Only these pieces I had selected," said Deil, pointing to a dozen articles on the table.

"Why not take it all, while you were about it?" asked the puzzled merchant.

"I had reasons which were sufficient to my own mind," said Deil calmly.

"Educated, eh?" Kennell appeared interested. "You must be an amateur, judging by the noise you made. I don't see how you can plead temporary financial desperation, with that watch and chain hanging to your vest. You could probably get more on that from a pawnbroker than you could get for what silver you've got laid out there."

Deil started, and stared at the householder through his horn-rimmed spectacles. He had forgotten about that watch. Damn!

"Pretty well dressed, too," Kennell went on. "With those glasses, you look like a professor."

"I assure you I'm not a professor," said Deil hastily.

"Well, then, what are you?" Kennell demanded.

"I'm a burglar."

"You're some kind of a crank," decided Kennell, dropping his automatic upon the table. "Oh, don't look surprised. You don't look to me like a man who had enough nerve to carry a gun. Only drug fiends who'll take everything in sight carry guns and are ready to use them. Professionals take everything, too, but rarely carry a weapon. They don't want the police to find them armed if they're captured; but they don't make a lot of noise, either. You

don't look like a drug fiend to me, and I know you're not a professional thief."

Deil was staring at him seriously, drinking in every word.

"You seem to know all about criminals," he observed. "You have—ah—been in contact with them?"

"Only through you, if you're one," smiled Kennell; "but I read a little now and then."

"I see!" said Deil, slipping unconsciously into his classroom accents. "You think, then, that a criminal—a professional law-breaker, I mean—is a smart man?"

"On the contrary, I think he's a misguided fool, ignorant and base, and for that reason dangerous."

"Do you think it does any good to put him in prison and keep him there under the conditions which exist in most of our penal institutions?" inquired Deil anxiously.

Kennell's brows knitted.

"Say, look here!" he said sternly. "If you think you're going to get away with any sympathy racket, you're mistaken. Of course I believe in putting 'em in prison. If you'd been in jail, you wouldn't have been here trying to get away with my property, would you?"

Deil considered the pith of this argument; but he held to the point which was uppermost in his mind.

"Don't you think that the criminal mind would yield to a right-thinking mind stronger than itself? Don't you believe that more could be accomplished by kindness, instruction, and reasonable assistance than by the brutal methods which are so often employed in the treatment of the law's victims?"

"I believe in the humane treatment of prisoners," conceded Kennell, "especially in the case of first offenders. I believe they should be kept separate from seasoned criminals, and should receive limited sentences." He caught himself. "What's the idea in this argument?" he demanded. "Are you a first offender? I can see you're a bungler. Let's hear your story, and maybe I'll forget to telephone for the police."

Deil came to himself with a start. Here he was indulging in a conversation with the man he had intended to rob, and indirectly thwarting his own plans by intriguing the interest and sympathy of his victim. He moved closer to the table.

"I didn't come here to tell you a story," he said, in a voice which he intended to be

rough; "and I'm not particularly interested in your ideas or beliefs," he added.

He lurched suddenly across the table, and made as if to grasp the pistol; but Kennell beat him to it.

"So that's it!" said the young merchant. "Putting up a lot of talk as a stall until you could get a chance at the gun, eh? I don't believe you're such a dumb-bell after all. Georgia! Oh, Georgia!"

His wife came tripping into the room in her dressing gown.

"Call police headquarters and tell them we've got a burglar up here," Kennell instructed, as he kept his weapon trained on Deil.

Deil smiled at the woman, who was regarding him in horrified fascination.

"That's quite the proper thing to do," he said, as she went out of the room to telephone.

"I think you'll bear investigation," said Kennell. "You act too smart for a common burglar. Goodness knows what you intended to do here. Maybe you're insane, for all I know."

For the first time Deil felt a sense of misgiving concerning his venture; but no—it was too palpably a case of plain burglary to be mistaken for the prank of a lunatic. The authorities would see to that.

"You're pretty much of a dumb-bell, as you call it, yourself," he said insolently.

The silence which followed this remark was broken by the clanging arrival of the police patrol outside the house. Mrs. Kennell admitted two plain-clothes men and a uniformed policeman. The first of the detectives—a burly individual with a blossoming nose which vouched for its owner's acquaintance with many bootlegging establishments—looked at Deil and at the little pile of silver on the table. Kennell explained at some length.

"Tried to talk him out of it, did you?" snarled the officer. "I know your kind. Come on with me. Jenkins, gather up that stuff on the table for evidence. We'll put this feller where he belongs, Mr. Kennell. He's a new one around here, I guess. Lucky we caught him at his first job! Come on, you!"

Deil was unceremoniously pushed into the dark interior of the patrol wagon and whisked to police headquarters and the city jail. As the cell door closed on him, the adventurous professor felt a little series of thrills run up his spine.

"Whatja in for, guy?" called another prisoner in the tier.

"Robbery," answered Deil proudly, as he polished his spectacles.

Next day, with the filing of the information by the county attorney, he was removed to the county jail. He announced his intention of pleading guilty to the charge of housebreaking against him, and asked for early arraignment. He was accommodated on the second day after the calling of the calendar in the district court for that term.

He had been fingerprinted and photographed, and the county attorney, appreciative of the fact that his man had voluntarily pleaded guilty, told the court that he could find no evidence of a previous criminal record.

Deil stated that it was his first attempt at crime; but further than that he would say nothing, although the judge evinced considerable interest in him. No identifying papers had been found upon his person. He had given the name of John Swift.

"My experience with criminals convinces me that you are either a master of crime or a novice driven to your first misdeed by some circumstance which your pride prevents you from divulging," said the judge. "I am inclined to accept the latter theory, and, in view of the fact that you have pleaded guilty, I will be lenient in this instance. I sentence you to serve from one to two years in the State penitentiary."

"Thank you," murmured Deil, as he bowed before the bench.

III

THREE days later Emmett Deil was taken by a deputy sheriff to the penitentiary. Again the professor felt thrills running up and down his spine as the gates in the stone wall opened to admit him. He smiled at the assistant warden who registered him. He gave his occupation as that of a laborer, which caused his interrogator to glance at him queerly.

This over, he received a compulsory bath and a close hair-cut. Then a temporary prison suit was dealt out to him, and he was informed that he would be measured next day for a new uniform, which would prove a better fit. The cell captain assigned him to a cell and introduced him to the man who was to be his cell mate.

"This is Folson," said the cell captain briefly. "He'll put you wise to the rules,

an' if you're wise you'll obey 'em. Folson, this is Swift—a new customer."

The cell captain chuckled over his bit of persiflage as he left.

Deil sat down on the lower bunk.

"Upper bunk's yours," snapped Folson, a large, hairy man with a low forehead and beady black eyes.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Deil, as he hastily tossed his towel, his soap, and the few other belongings allowed him to the upper bunk, which his cell mate had lowered for him. "I'm No. 26,840. What's your number?"

"I'm labeled in enough places—you ought to be able to see it," growled Folson. "We don't pay much attention to numbers among ourselves. Say, are you—yes, I'm damned if you ain't a first-timer!"

The convict's tone carried a subtle brand of contempt.

"Well, we've all got to start some time," smirked Deil, who was conscious of a feeling of shame that he should appear so inexperienced before this man.

"What 'd they trip you up on?" demanded Folson.

"I beg your—"

"Can that!" Folson interrupted. "The only pardon I'm interested in is one from the Governor, and there ain't no chance to get that. What're you in here for? Course, I know you didn't do it. None of 'em does anything the first trip. What did they say you did?"

"Burglary," explained Deil. "Caught me trying to rob a house."

"Well, I guess they don't think much of *me* around this joint," said Folson, "giving me a common prowler for a cell mate!"

Again Deil sensed contempt in the man's tone.

"What were you accused of?" he asked timidly.

"Forgery," snapped Folson; "and a damned good job, too. If it hadn't been for that rat skirt, I'd 'a' put it over. This is twice skirts has got me a jolt in the big house. I did four years in Sing Sing on a highway robbery count when I ought to 'a' been walking the streets every day. How much did they hang on you?"

"One to two years," replied Deil, wincing at the sound of the words.

"That means you won't have to do over one, if you don't pull anything," said Folson. "You must 'a' slipped the judge a

powder to get off as easy as that. I'm doing not less'n ten."

"I guess you've had lots of experience," Deil ventured.

"Oh, I've been on the racket a spell," said Folson, trying to appear bored instead of boastful. "I've passed the dip stage, cracked a few cribs, hung a lot of paper, and took a flyer at the pay-off. Women is my downfall. I'm a poor picker!"

Emmett Deil smiled benignly. Here was a fine subject to work upon. Here was a most *excellent* subject to work upon! A seasoned criminal—an habitual lawbreaker, apparently proud of his dubious profession! The amateur burglar rubbed his hands and smiled delightedly.

"It's quite an honor to have a man like yourself for a room—cell mate, I mean," he bubbled.

"Damned lucky for a common prowler, and a bum one at that!" said Folson, although his chest swelled perceptibly. "There's the dinner bell. It's lunch time for bankers, but it's only twelve o'clock for convicts. Don't forget to fold your arms going downstairs, and keep your mouth shut."

IV

THAT night Deil asked his cell mate about the various activities in the prison. He learned that convicts could select the sort of work they wanted to do, providing there were openings in the department favored. Folson, it seemed, worked in the laundry.

"There's a chance down there, I guess, if you want it," he told Deil.

"Fine!" beamed Deil. "I'll apply for it." He wanted to keep as close to Folson as he could, for Folson was to be the subject of his great experiment. "How did it come you were not working when I came in this morning?" he asked.

"They bumped a guy off to-day," replied Folson sleepily. "We're kept in tight when they have an execution."

Deil lay in his bunk, thinking, and finally went to sleep to the accompaniment of his cell mate's raucous snores.

Next day he was photographed and measured, and then taken before the warden. The interview was short and to the point. Deil received some sound advice affecting his conduct in the prison, and was assigned to work in the laundry. The warden tried unsuccessfully to glean some inkling of the

new convict's past life; but Deil merely smiled at him through his horn-rimmed glasses, and thus convinced the official that his silence was due to family pride or some such thing. It was apparent that his language aroused the warden's interest.

Then began the monotony of prison life; but it wasn't all monotony to Emmett Deil. He was interested. He was in close contact with criminals for the first time in his life. He speedily began to turn the full force of his reasoning upon his cell mate, who listened tolerantly and curiously, plainly respectful of Deil's command of language and his ability to marshal his thoughts into a logical sequence, but scornful of his performance as a crimester.

"If crime is such a bad thing, how does it happen you're here?" Folson would ask Deil.

This was always a hard one. The only signs of irritation which Deil displayed came when Folson handed him that one.

"You ain't any better'n I am," Folson would charge. "You're in stir same's me, ain't you?"

Deil would polish his glasses and glare at his cell mate, for he had no adequate reply.

It was notable that there never was any argument on an evening after the supper hadn't been up to what was considered a standard. In this respect Deil had the edge on Folson, and commanded further respect by reason of his purchases of butter, sugar, and other supplies to the full limit allowed the two of them. Folson was prepared to listen, and to agree to almost anything, so long as Deil continued to stock the larder. On visiting days—the third Friday of each month, when prisoners were allowed to visit one another's cells—he confided to certain friends that he was lucky to have a cell mate who had a big "kangaroo" stake with the warden.

In a month Emmett Deil had won the confidence of the guards and the assistant warden. Certain privileges were accorded him. He was the subject of much persiflage because of his polite manner, his cultivated speech, and his professional spectacles; but he was generally liked, and Folson listened to him patiently.

Deil took this last fact to mean that his reasoning was having its effect upon his cell mate. He glowed with the conviction that he was bringing Folson around to the right way of thinking. He gloated over the prospect of showing Hornblatt concrete results.

He hadn't heard from Hornblatt, for they had agreed not to correspond except in case of extreme necessity. Well, he would surprise the doctor; and so he redoubled his efforts directed at Folson.

Two months, and Deil was getting outside occasionally on prison business connected with the laundry. It was all going as he had anticipated. Little the prison authorities knew what was going on in his mind! Just as he had suspected, they had proved, in his opinion, to be ignorant. Just as the typewriter may be mightier than the machine gun, so did Emmett Deil believe brains more effective than stone walls.

Two weeks later he took Folson into his confidence.

"I'm going to break out of prison," he announced.

"You're *what*?" stammered the astounded forger.

"I'm going to break out of prison, and I'm going to take you with me," said Deil firmly. "That is, if you wish to go. Will you take a chance?"

Folson stared at him stupidly, but finally managed to nod.

V

LITTLE by little, during the evenings when they were alone in their cell, Deil told Folson of his plans. He also ventured a little more information about himself. Finally, convinced that Folson had succumbed to his arguments and was at last seeing the light, he divulged his secret, withholding nothing. He even mentioned Hornblatt, and condemned him for his attitude toward criminals.

Folson was now interested to a marked degree. He listened in rapt attention. He asked questions about Hornblatt, too, and encouraged Deil to talk about him by agreeing with everything he said.

"You say he's a terror to crooks?" he asked Deil. "That doctor feller, I mean. They're scared of him?"

"That they are," Deil affirmed. "He can keep any amount of money in his office safe, without fear that it will be molested. He claims to be a criminologist, and he is often called into court in cases where insanity is the defense. We'll show him something, Folson; and when you're well started making good in a respectable way, I'll see that you get a pardon."

Folson was properly appreciative in his way. He seemed to have a new respect for

Deil, after the latter's announcement of the plan to escape; but he made no comment on the professor's revelation of his purpose in getting into prison.

On a night some two weeks later, about three months after Deil's term began, he told Folson that all was ready for their departure from the prison's confines next morning.

"I am to take a load of rejected linen and blankets to the railway freight station in the morning," Deil explained in a whisper. "I have taken a number of the blankets out of one case, and hidden them away. In the morning I will ask you to help me load the cases on the truck. We will load the half empty case last, and you will get into it. You can get out at the freight station, and the two of us will run for the hills. You know they trust me implicitly, and I'll not have any difficulty in getting away."

Here Folson took charge.

"An empty box car on a freight train would be better than making a run for it," he said. "Don't show any speed and attract attention. Folks don't expect to see fellers in prison duds hurrying much. Let me take care of the guard at the station—"

"No, no!" whispered Deil hoarsely. "There must be no violence. I won't permit it. We must effect our escape clean, and thus leave something of a favorable impression."

"Well, we'll see when the time comes," Folson conceded.

They whispered over their plans well into the night, and both were awake when the prison gong sounded at half past six in the morning.

As Deil had foreseen, no one objected to Folson assisting him in loading the cases on the truck in the yard near the laundry. As the last case was set in place, Deil engaged the attention of the guard and driver, while Folson slipped into his hiding place. His disappearance caused no suspicion, since it was taken for granted that he had gone into the laundry building.

On the way to the freight station Deil was struck by sudden uneasiness. The driver, another trusted man, might cause trouble. Deil, inexperienced as he was, had merely thought of evading the guard. The driver of the truck had not entered into his thoughts to any extent, because of the fact that the man was a convict. He had assumed that the convicts' code of honor—a

thing which he did not exactly understand—would keep the driver's lips sealed, regardless of what he saw or suspected; but as the time for the big adventure drew near, he was assailed by a feeling of grave doubt. He was not so certain of his moves, and there were no thrills running up and down his spine. Instead, he imagined that a peculiar chill was usurping the function of the thrills. His hands and feet felt cold. But he might as well have saved himself all this worry.

When the truck drew up at the receiving platform, a form flashed past him over the packing cases. He saw Folson's right arm lift and fall twice with lightning swiftness. Guard and driver became suddenly limp and slumped forward against the dash. Then Folson was over the side, beckoning to him.

Without pausing to think, Deil clambered down and joined Folson, who led the way rapidly behind a string of box cars. They broke into a run, and sped swiftly toward the lower end of the yard. They could hear the rumble of a moving train to the right of them, beyond several strings of cars.

Folson suddenly changed his course, swung himself to one of the motionless cars on the right, and jumped down on the other side. Deil scrambled after him, crawling across the track under the car. In this way they came to a track upon which a freight train was moving westward. It was gathering speed rapidly.

"Take the next gondola!" yelled Folson, as he swung himself up on a car.

Emmett Deil looked at the rushing train in stupefaction. It was moving fast—faster and faster every moment.

Deil knew that he had about one chance in a hundred of getting on that train. To attempt it was to risk his life—in all likelihood, to lose it. He had never even boarded the steps of a moving passenger coach, to say nothing of catching a freight car. Then the caboose flashed past him, and the train disappeared around a curve at the lower end of the yards.

He stood breathless, staring vacantly at a film of smoke which the train had left floating lazily in its wake.

Then the stillness of the morning was shattered by the piercing scream of the prison siren. Town and countryside were instantly apprised of the fact that a convict or convicts had escaped.

Deil looked wildly about him. His reasoning power fled. He was not Emmett Deil, a professor of the Dale Normal School; he was John Swift, No. 26,840, an escaped convict!

For another moment he wavered in uncertainty. Then he broke into a run, heading for the green hills beyond the yards. He stumbled and fell upon the tracks. The cinders cut into his hands, and his left knee-cap struck a rail, compelling him to halt for several precious moments, the victim of an excruciating pain.

He heard shouts behind him, and again he ran as best he could toward the shelter of the trees that clothed the rolling hills ahead. The shouts became more distinct. Tears actually rolled down his cheeks as he realized that his recapture was practically certain.

Next he felt his arms gripped in a powerful grasp, and he was jerked to a standstill. He looked to see two men in overalls and jumpers standing on either side of him, holding him.

"Here's where we take down that standing reward of a hundred for grabbing an escaped con!" said one of the men to the other.

Then Emmett Deil collapsed.

VI

For three days the recaptured prisoner was confined in the "hole"—a punishment room—on a diet of bread and water. Then, to his overwhelming relief, he was sent for by the warden.

The failure of his plan for escape, so far as he was concerned, had dampened his ardor for the experiment which he had undertaken. The thought of returning to a cell and serving out his term was revolting. He was heartily sick of the whole business.

Also, he was disappointed in Folson, although he hoped the man would go straight, as he had indicated while the break was being planned. Indeed, the redemption of Folson would be worth all that he had undergone, Deil reflected with a measure of satisfaction.

He became irritated when he thought of Folson jumping on a freight train and leaving his benefactor in the lurch. Perhaps Folson, being accustomed to hopping trains, thought nothing of it, and didn't realize that Deil was physically incapable of such a performance.

Meanwhile the thing to do was to get out-

side for good. Deil wanted to get out, and he didn't care how he got out, so long as he regained his liberty. This was his frame of mind as he was ushered into the warden's office.

The official looked at him coolly and speculatively.

"So you intended to leave us!" he said sarcastically.

To save his life, Emmett Deil couldn't think of a suitable reply at the moment.

"I am inclined to accord you the consideration of believing that it was Folson's scheme," the warden went on. "I don't think you have the experience or the initiative to plan an escape. Did you knock out the guard and the driver?"

"No," replied Deil truthfully. "I advised against it."

"As I suspected!" said the warden, frowning. "It was Folson's work all the way through, no doubt; but you showed very bad intent in joining in with him. I shall have to mete out the punishment which is usual in cases of this kind."

Here Emmett Deil found his speech.

"It wasn't Folson who planned the escape," he said earnestly. "It was I. I can promise that Folson will go straight. I talked to him for two months to convince him that his way of thinking was wrong. I'll tell you the whole story."

And he did. In the next half hour the warden heard everything; for whenever Emmett Deil hesitated, he thought of the gloomy cell, and the warm sunshine outside, and the green of the hills, and the quiet of his library in his rooms at Dale Normal; and the impulse to conceal certain rather embarrassing details was speedily suppressed. He omitted nothing. If anything, he elaborated in his eagerness. It was possibly the most frank confession, and certainly the most interesting and erudite recital of the kind, that the warden ever had heard.

Conflicting emotions of astonishment, incredulity, disgust, and humor flitted across the warden's face as he listened. Emmett Deil polished his glasses three times during his discourse. When he had finished, the warden fussed with some papers on his desk, now and then shooting a queer look at Deil.

Then he leaned back in his chair and stared at the professor. Twice he opened his mouth to speak, but didn't. He fussed again with the papers, and looked around his office as if he had never seen any of the

things in it before. Finally he spoke sharply to Deil.

"I'm going to investigate your story, more because of curiosity than anything else," he said, scowling. "Meanwhile you will be taken back to your old cell."

VII

A WEEK later Deil was again sent for by the warden. As he entered the latter's office, he stopped suddenly with a sagging jaw. Sitting in a chair by the desk, and regarding him coldly, was Dr. Angus Heywood Brown, president of Dale Normal. Beside Dr. Brown sat another man, whom Deil did not know.

Deil turned as if he would run, but was halted by the warden's pleasant greeting.

"I believe you are acquainted with Dr. Brown," said the official amiably. "This gentleman is Mr. O. S. Borden, of the State parole board."

Deil's spirits rose as he bowed to the parole officer. It was going to be all right, then; but his eyes wavered as he looked again at Dr. Brown.

The warden motioned Deil to a chair—a courtesy which he did not ordinarily extend to a prisoner.

"We have made a careful investigation of your case," he said. "Your statements made to me have been substantiated in many respects."

"You—talked or—communicated with Dr. Hornblatt?" stammered Deil.

"Dr. Brown and I visited Dr. Hornblatt," said the warden. "He gave us considerable information."

"Did he—send any word to me?" asked Deil anxiously.

"I believe he said something to the effect that you should undergo a mental examination at the earliest possible moment," replied the warden dryly.

"If I had known that you wished to spend your leave of absence in jail, I might have arranged for you to be accommodated in Dale," interposed Dr. Brown grimly.

The warden smiled. Then he again addressed Emmett Deil.

"Dr. Hornblatt, and I believe Dr. Brown, intend to take this matter up with the Governor—"

"Any action I take will be to endeavor to at least partly uphold the honor of the institution which I represent," snapped Dr. Brown.

The warden nodded.

"Dr. Hornblatt, I understand, will give the matter his attention as soon as he is able to go to the State capital, which will be in about a month or six weeks. In the mean time, if the parole board should wish to act, a decision in the matter might be expedited."

"The coincidence is so unusual that I hardly believe the board would care to look into the matter without instructions from the Governor," said Mr. Borden.

"In that case, of course, we shall have to wait on Dr. Hornblatt, the Governor, and the next meeting of the board, which will be three months from now," said the warden.

"Coincidence?" faltered Deil. "Why is it going to take Dr. Hornblatt so long to go to the State capital?"

"Dr. Hornblatt is confined to his bed," explained the warden.

"Is the doctor ill?" asked Deil, instantly concerned.

"He is recuperating from a bullet wound in the shoulder. A burglar entered his house a few nights ago, and, when discovered in the act of robbing the safe, he shot Dr. Hornblatt."

"Infamous!" exclaimed Deil. "A man who will do a thing like that ought to be right in here! Dr. Hornblatt—I trust he is sure to recover?"

"I hear that he is doing nicely," said the warden.

"And his assailant—is he at large?"

"Fortunately he was apprehended. He will be here in a few days."

"And it's just where he belongs!" declared Emmett Deil indignantly. "What—who was he?"

"He is an escaped convict by the name of Folson," said the warden cheerfully.

THE SEA WIND

LIFE is a sea wind rattling through the town;
Let not your doors be shut, your blinds be down,
Else, in the lamplight, you shall learn at last
You missed her while she stormed and blustered past!

Stanton A. Coblenz

Pepperpot

THE ADVENTURES OF THORNE FAIRFAX, LATE FIRST
LIEUTENANT, UNITED STATES NAVY, ON
A TROPIC ISLE OF ROMANCE

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "The Sultana," "Pearl Island," etc.

XXIII

ANDERSEN had made a long watch of it, so I took the wheel and told him to get some sleep. Ito presently finished his work below and came on deck. I sent him forward to stretch out alongside the forecastle hatch, where he could serve as a sentry and could be on hand to slack head sheets when we had to tack ship.

The breeze was light and baffling, but the night was fine. The frequent showers of Martinique usually confine themselves to the land, no doubt as the result of sudden thermic changes over it that tend to produce condensation and precipitation. With its high mountains, the island is particularly favored in this respect, thus keeping fresh and verdant. Its tree ferns, in particular, are such as I have never seen in any other part of the world.

There is nothing like a solitary watch at the wheel on such a night as this to induce reflection and contemplation, and I had plenty of material for both functions. I quickly abandoned the former process, however—that of studying out the why and wherefore of all this coil. It did not seem worth while to beat my brain about it until the evidence for the defense was in. The time might be much more pleasantly, if not more profitably, spent in contemplation of the wonderful girl I had discovered.

It struck me that I had fallen into the error common to Americans in their social relations with the French—that of assuming the subdued and self-oblitative young daughter or daughters of a good French family to be a negligible quantity. Because well bred French girls are taught to be seen

rather than heard, and in the presence of their elders not to speak unless spoken to, the foreigner seldom gives them credit for their exceedingly alert and intelligent minds. Then, on marrying, they seem suddenly to burgeon, to exfoliate, like a butterfly leaving its cocoon. The simile is inept, however, because they have been butterflies for some time past, but imprisoned beneath a bell jar.

It was a little different, of course, with Jasmine, because she had traveled and enjoyed—greatly enjoyed, I imagine—the intimacy of that perfectly consolable war widow, Mme. Dieudonné. Moreover, she was half American. Two very dominant strains coursed through her veins with considerable rapidity, I should say; but the influence of her mother had met with no resistance through her upbringing, and had governed her demeanor, if not her more recent mental attitude.

No doubt Mme. Saint Cyr had been determined that her beautiful daughter should marry some very rich man of title—if there are any such left. It was probably her forceful impressing of this ambition on the frisky *veuve soieuse* that had scared Mme. Dieudonné into her flat refusal to give me any information about Jasmine.

After all, it did not greatly matter. I could not see myself in the picture at all. If Grosvenor were to recognize Jasmine as his legitimate daughter, then her great inheritance would be the obstacle. If he defied Mme. Saint Cyr to establish her legal claim, then the result must be the same, with Jasmine's poverty the barrier to a penniless soldier of fortune like myself. Either way, I seemed to be disqualified for entry.

My candidature as a suitor was about as hopeful as if I had aspired to be appointed ambassador to the court of St. James. All I had to offer was family, and no American family, unless backed by millions, makes any impression at all on a European, or on the colonial descendant of a European. I might be a direct descendant of Lord Fairfax, but there were plenty of actively operating lords, and even dukes and arch-dukes and princes, who would jump for Jasmine—especially if she were to inherit a fortune, and I had a pretty strong conviction that she would.

There was not the least belief in my mind that Grosvenor had knowingly and purposely abandoned his young wife in her distress. A Senegambian lurked in that cordwood. When Grosvenor recovered sufficiently, he might be able to prove that he had been the victim of some devilish deceit; but even that did not appear to wipe off the charge of heartlessness in his immediate second marriage.

However, the point of principal interest to me was that, although I had just denied it, Jasmine was actually as far beyond my reach as a matchless pearl in a jeweler's showcase. I decided dismally that the best thing I could do was to finish the job in hand, collect my pay, and, with this added grubstake, move on for the swamps of the Mazaruni.

Jasmine, that lovely goddess of the passionate isle, was not for me. The multi-colored flame from her many facets was destined to shine in brighter salons than I could ever hope to furnish.

This occasion, I thought, was probably the first time that she had ever acted on her own initiative, as opposed to her mother. Here again I had exposed myself to bitter recriminations for allowing her to do so, but I did not care. Mme. Saint Cyr had started the outdoor sport of girl-snatching, and I was finishing it for her.

Besides, Jasmine had come of her own accord, and for what I felt to be an imperative reason. It was necessary that she and Carol should thrash this thing out between them.

Mme. Saint Cyr would have antagonized Carol and infuriated her. My own arguments in Jasmine's behalf would have been worse than useless, because Carol would have jumped to the perfectly true conclusion that I was in love with her half sister, and had my own ax to grind.

I could see Carol, who had the American love for publicity and a defiance of any sort of blackmail, tearing off to the governor or the prosecuting attorney, or perhaps to both, and raising the very devil of a row. Jasmine was the only one who might be able to handle the situation.

And so we drifted along through the soft tropic night. I had no desire to sleep, so I did not call Andersen. Two or three times the light breeze headed us. Each time, at my call of "Ready about!" the cat-napping Ito would spring up, ease fore sheets, and then, as we paid off on the other tack, haul down the lee ones and make them fast. No sign of life came from the fore-castle, the occupants of which I had, in fact, almost forgotten.

The dawn came in a little mistily. I had been steering principally by guess—an accomplishment of mine, as I have stated—knowing that as soon as we got in its proximity I was bound to sight the island, as there is no real fog in these waters and the land was high. Also there was a gibbous moon, flat on its back and horns up, as the tropic moon sometimes negligently reposes itself. The light mist was a sort of aura of the island, and I presently discovered that my dreamy orientation was accurate. This was not surprising, after so much ferrying back and forth.

Directly ahead were the landmarks with which I was by this time so familiar. Then, as we drew in, I discovered something else. From the little beach where we had camped a thin column of dense white smoke was mounting high into the air. This, as Mme. Saint Cyr had informed me, was the signal for Achilles's boat; but it would not be visible from Martinique for at least an hour, I thought, and this apparent urgency in starting it before the sun had risen worried me a little.

We were almost up to our anchorage, gliding at fair speed and close-hauled on the wind. I whistled to Ito. He sprang up, all set for further orders.

"Call the mate," I said, for Andersen had some sanitary superstition about sleeping under the stars in the tropics, though there is no fever to speak of on Martinique.

He had heard my whistle and came up, mumbling reproaches for my having stood his watch.

"I couldn't sleep," I said. "Haul down your head sails and clear the anchor."

The order was smartly carried out, and

I luffed into the wind, for the Integrity would shoot about a quarter of a mile when under good headway. She finally decided to fetch up.

"Let go the anchor!" I called.

The thrumming of the chain cable brought Jasmine on deck—or, at least, it brought her beautiful face to the top of the companionway, where, framed in the hatch, it glowed against the dark background like a freshly opened night-blooming cereus.

"Good morning, sir," said she. "May I come up?"

"You may," I answered, "but do not go forward. How did you sleep?"

"Deliciously. It's a habit I let nothing interfere with. And you, sir?"

"I did not need to sleep," I answered. "I found that I could dream without it." Stepping to the companionway, I took a pair of binoculars from the rack. "Something has happened over there, or else they're getting sick of it. You see their smoke?"

Then I called to Andersen, who had stopped the cable.

"Drop the gig!"

The light was increasing rapidly, as it does in the low latitudes, where day and night reveal their fresh problems with startling suddenness, like turning the pages of a ledger. Through the strong glasses I now discovered three figures on the beach, and quickly identified them as Carol, Hercule, and Pensée. The *brigadier* was not to be seen, and I wondered why.

"You and Ito jump into the boat and get over there as quick as you can," I said to Andersen. Then, at the whispered suggestion of some good fairy, perhaps, I turned to Jasmine. "You had better go with them, I think."

I helped her into the gig, and they started off. They reached the shore, where there was not the slightest surf, as is usual on Windward Island beaches not exposed to the prevailing winds. Still no sign of Jean Baptiste. Jasmine's deduction had been correct, as I expected, but where was Jean Baptiste?

Anxious and intent on watching them through the glass, I failed to see the hand that was thrust through a hole cut in the panel of the door to the booby hatch, and felt gropingly for the upper and lower bolts. Still staring through the glass, I did not see the door swing open, nor the six crouching figures that must have stolen out like

wolves, freshly trapped, whose cunning has discovered the spring latch that releases the door of their cage.

XXIV

WHAT price my boasted instincts? What value that sixth sense that all wild animals are said by some people to possess? Where was my good fairy?

Perhaps, when a young man is hopelessly in love, these protective agencies abandon him to his fate and give him up in disgust, despairing of being able to divert his focus from its objective. Perhaps he may be like a crustacean in the shedding stage—in other words, like any other lobster. Or, again, falling in love may be like falling into a reservoir when one can't swim, the senses being immediately inundated. It may be also possible that a man in love for the first time is supposed to enjoy some peculiar immunity from violence, like a drunkard, or from illness, like a newborn babe.

Be all this as it may, I continued to stand there by the quarter rail, staring through the glasses, intent to observe the meeting between Jasmine and Carol, and utterly oblivious to the much livelier potential meeting between a brass belaying pin and my head. And yet these thugs had to cross a stretch of deck, one after the other, almost at right angles to my line of vision.

I remember that my eyes watered from my unblinking stare, and I took the glasses away to clear them. In doing so, I glanced astern instead of ahead. Upon my word, my inability to see the crawling peril would have been ridiculous to a casual observer. I was like the brave, bone-headed hero of melodrama, who gazes at the portrait of his darling on the center table of the set, while the villain takes measures for his assassination and subtends a good three-quarters of the hero's arc of vision while so doing.

All that saved my life was a physical defect on the part of the anarchist professor. He was flat-footed, perhaps from much standing while haranguing his hearers on the ethical philosophy of murder; or perhaps his gait may have been a little spasmodic as the result of a sun meningitis on Devil's Island. In any case, as he now rose erect, his toe drop resulted in the ball of his foot striking the deck with a little flap.

People react differently when startled by a sudden mortal danger. Some, even though courageous enough, suffer an instant

of pause that is often fatal. Other brains act before there is time for thought, just as the eyelids close at a sharp report. Luckily for me, I belong to the latter class.

I spun around and ducked, barely in time to dodge the blow from the brass belaying pin with which the anarchist let drive at me. It was heavy and smooth, and slipped out of his hand, and before he could recover himself I gripped him by both thighs and threw him over my head into the sea.

He made a grab for my shoulder, and upset my balance, so that I went over after him. We struck the water together. I kicked him clear, and he must have sunk immediately. Anarchists and water are incompatible, so that few of them know how to swim.

I snatched the revolver from its holster, and a couple of strokes brought me to the sea ladder we had dropped over the side. As I gripped this in one hand, I looked up to see the Apache in the act of letting drive at me with another pin; but I was the quicker, and shot him through the head. He fell across the rail, his arms dangling.

There came a tug at the ladder, but I was already on the lowest flat rung and starting up. Then, as my head came above the rail, a man—the lion tamer—smashed down a terrific blow with the iron brake of one of the hand winches. I saw it coming, and got my head below the solid teak just in time.

Before he could recover, I bobbed up again and fired into him, the muzzle almost against his body. He fell against me, and to save myself from going overboard I had to loose my hold on the revolver, which splashed down into the water. The next minute I was over the rail and on deck, with the *chef* dancing around me wildly and jabbing at me with a knife, which he must have taken from the galley and secreted somewhere.

The two other men had run forward—to get the windlass brakes, I guessed; so there was no time to be wasted with the cook. I feinted at him with one arm. As he lunged, I grappled, got the knife through the heavy muscles under my shoulder, then gripped his flabby throat and forced him back and overboard.

The knife dropped out of me and fell on the deck. I whipped it up and turned to face the other two. They came gliding aft, each with one of the flat iron windlass brakes. I could see from their faces that

they expected to make a quick end of the business, come what might of it later.

But here I fooled them, they not being deep-sea sailors like myself. I made a dash as if to tackle them. As I had expected, they fetched up short on the defensive, instead of rushing to meet me, as they might easily have done with small risk to themselves. Then, instead of carrying through the charge and being promptly killed, I jumped for the shrouds and ran up the rigging. I knew they had no firearms, and they could not hope to do much with their iron bars aloft.

Twenty or thirty feet up I rested, panting, on the ratlines, and shoved the meat knife through my belt. For a moment they stared up at me, baffled, like a couple of wolves that have missed their rush at a lynx, giving the animal time to run up a tree.

In that instant of silence I could hear the blood from the wound in my back and side dropping on the deck beneath. My single shirt had been torn away, and there must have been some little artery severed and spouting. This could not go on for very long, but neither could the pair afford to wait. The shots had been heard from the shore, and as I glanced in that direction I saw Andersen and Ito and Hercule frantically shoving the boat off the beach.

The pair beneath me saw it, too, and it drove them desperate. They knew that Andersen was armed. For a moment they seemed to hesitate; then one of them rushed for the shrouds on the other side, and started up. His plan was clear enough—to get up and across the truck, then to come down and attack me from above. This left no choice for me but to get to the truck ahead of him.

Up I started as fast as I could manage it. If it had not been for my wound, and the rapidly increasing loss of blood, I could have been up and over and met him halfway down the other side. I had always been a handy man aloft, and he, though strong and active, was encumbered with his windlass brake; but the wound had crippled me a little, more in raising my arm for the next hold than in hauling up my weight, and I was getting breathless. Glancing down under my arm, I saw the other fellow starting up after me.

One thinks quickly in such a fix. I thought I saw my chance; but whatever was to be done had to be done quickly, for

my strength was squirting out of me in a small red stream. Astonishing, the power in a pint or two of crimson fluid! But then there is astonishing power in water, or gasoline, or a drop or two of nitroglycerin, for that matter.

Halfway up I paused as if exhausted, just on the same level as the man in the rigging opposite, who, by the converging of the shrouds, was only about a dozen feet away from me. His mate was plugging doggedly up about the same distance beneath me. He must have been a stupid, one-ideaed sort of brute, with no thought in his vicious brain but my destruction, like an army ant climbing a stalk of grass to kill a winged wasp, which will probably sting the ant to death before being itself destroyed.

Then, suddenly, I let myself go on the run, the shrouds slipping through my hands. The fellow had no time to get a grip with one hand and strike with the other. I jammed in between him and the shrouds, fetched up astride a ratline, whipped out the cook knife, and thrust it into him. His arms flew wide, and the iron bar clanged down upon the deck.

"*Diable!*" he croaked, then spun around sidewise and fell with a crash, his head smashing the saloon skylight.

So far so good; but the job was not yet over, and the boat was still a good quarter of a mile away, though foaming out as fast as three strong men could send her. Big, brawny Andersen was pulling on one side, against Ito and Hercule on the other.

Opposite me, the last of the gang was now racing me down the rigging, as a moment before he had been racing me up it. I might have started back and beat him to the truck this time, but I did not dare trust myself up there on the crosstrees. Things were getting too swimmy.

Moreover, by this time I was raving mad, half blind, but raging, like a bull in the arena, who, severely wounded and full of *banderillas*, still fights not only men, but the death which instinct tells him they have already dealt him. I wanted that last convict, and I meant to live long enough to get him.

We struck the deck almost together. I had slid the last few fathoms on a backstay runner, and I landed just beside the capstan brake. I fumbled a moment before being able to pick it up; but once my grip closed on the good iron, my strength seemed suddenly to return. No doubt there are cer-

tain subtle and tremendous currents, etheric, or even spiritual, that course through iron in contact with the hands of a fighting man, to give him strength—if he is receptive to them, and at this moment I was all of that.

Across the deck I walked. My opponent likewise walked to meet me. To-day I am bound to admire him, though I was too far gone to feel it at the time. He must have realized that in any case his race was run; that whether he killed me or not, he was a doomed man. If Andersen did not take care of that, then the Palais de Justice would. As an escaped convict from Devil's Island, who had tried with others of his kind to seize a yacht, and had killed the captain in the attempt, he would have about as much chance for his life as a man who tried to go over Niagara in a fisherman's dory.

But aside from courage, there was no saving grace in him. He saw me stagger slightly, and his lips parted in a malicious grin. Then, with a snarl, he sprang forward and struck.

I was ready for him. Oddly enough, it had been a little affair with broadswords that had got me expelled from the Naval Academy. It happened at Halifax during the summer cruise, the year before I was to graduate, and involved a British midshipman and myself in a lively duel that resulted in pretty serious damage to my adversary. It started in an argument over the naval engagements of the War of 1812, and finished for him in the sick bay, with his deltoid muscle cut cleanly through to the bone, but subcutaneously, and with no damage to the skin. Our weapons had neither point nor edge, yet the blade, though blunt, was narrow enough to inflict that injury.

The weapon I now held was of somewhat similar sort, though, in comparison to a broadsword, it was like a two-handed claymore to a cutlass. It had a comforting feel to it, as I have said, and seemed to steady me and clear my vision. It struck me as odd that the exercise of an accomplishment that had brought me early disgrace, and had altered the tenor of my whole life, was now in a fair way to save it.

I parried the blow easily enough, adopting a hanging guard, as it would not do to risk having the flat iron, with its square edges, slide down to mangle my hand.

This idea of making the contest a fencing bout appeared a new one to the convict. No doubt he had counted on finishing the

business with a smash or two. He drew back, and eyed me with a sort of curiosity.

"*Tiens!*" he muttered. "What if I surrender? Will you give me your word to swear that I helped you, so that I can get my pardon?"

"Not for an instant!" I answered. "You go back to Cayenne!"

He slashed at me again, several times, but his blows slid off my impromptu weapon, though numbing my fingers. This would not do. A direct and heavy blow might paralyze my grip so that I could not hold the bar. I think he must have seen what was coming, for he sprang clear again.

"Have you no mercy, *m'sieur?*"

"Not for such as you," I answered, and freshened my grip to finish the business.

"I fought in the great war," he muttered, and flung down the capstan brake. "Make an end if you like. I'd rather have that than Devil's Island!"

He had said the only words that could have saved him—"I fought in the great war." Somehow they got through to my senses, and for a moment I saw a war picture of the coast of France, off St. Nazaire—a smooth jade sea, with a long ground swell ruling it off with mathematical precision; thin winter sunshine, pale and anæmic, and a sky that was blue behind its pellucid haze. I saw nine American mine sweepers proceeding slowly in echelon—little fish boats, menhaden seiners, from the Jersey and Long Island coasts—the drag of each with an overlap on the track swept by the boat ahead, like Western harvesters gleaming a prairie.

In their wake came the little firing boats, motor launches with machine guns, to detonate mines that bobbed up when their moorings were caught and cut through by the "explosive knives" of the drag. Overhead were a blimp or two and some scouting seaplanes, and off here on the port hand a French *torpilleur*, ready to dart at an enemy periscope, should one appear. This man in front of me had been of the crew of one of these, to protect us in our hazardous work while we were all engrossed in keeping our precise position, getting azimuth sights as fast as they could be taken, triangulating on known objects—the tall lighthouse, the white church that appeared at instants through the brume, the red buoy we had anchored on a known position.

I could not slash down this former ally. I dropped the end of the bar on deck, and

stood there, breathing quickly, for the day seemed to darken.

There came a shout from the other side of the deck; then Andersen, revolver in hand, rushed over to where I stood. I swayed a little, and felt his arm thrown around me.

"Don't shoot him!" I muttered. "He fought in the great war!"

XXV

It seemed to me that a long way off somebody was singing in a thin, reedy voice. Then another singer took up the refrain, but was interrupted by the first. There were other elusive musical sounds—cool, pleasant sounds like the murmur of a brook. Odd that one who had listened through so many days and nights to the ripple of water along the ship's side should not have recognized the familiar noises!

Perhaps in extreme weakness, when one is partially detached from material things, the mind interprets them not as what they are, but as what it desires them to be. I was burning, and so I conjured up, as the most refreshing of recent impressions, the pool where I had bathed just before the coming of Jasmine and her mother. I seemed to be on its edge. In my efforts to roll into it, I threw out my arm and struck something that went over with a crash, bringing me back to fuller consciousness.

Looking up, I saw the white-enameled carlings overhead, and the more or less familiar details of Mr. Grosvenor's room aboard the yacht. Apparently we were under way, as there was a slight swaying motion. Then I became conscious of a frightful pain and soreness in my back and side.

"*Eh, bien, m'sieur!*" said a dry voice from a corner of the room. "So you are coming back to us!"

I twisted my head a little, and saw the old *brigadier* stretched out on the cushions of a locker.

"I told these *demoiselles* that you would. I said that such a man was not destined to meet his death from the jab of a dirty cook knife in the hand of a *crapaud* of a lousy convict!"

"Where were you?" I asked.

"Where was I?" He gave a snort. "You may well ask! To think that I, Jean Baptiste, should first have been making the stork foot while you sailed off with those bandits, and then, just when I was

needed for a bit of fighting, should be laid up with a leg like an elephant from the bite of a fer-de-lance!"

"And you're here to tell about it?" I murmured.

"Of course! It struck me on the shin, where there's nothing much but bone and leather, with a little gristle underneath. Besides, his fangs entangled themselves in the leg of my trousers, in which most of the venom was spat out. Hercule was there, and he sliced it open and sucked out what poison remained. That was just after you left us, when we were moving our camp back up into the bush. To think that I should have missed such a fight! But you made *pot pourri* of those murderous rascals. *Bon Dieu!*"

I started to speak, but he silenced me.

"Do not try to talk. I, Jean Baptiste, am the doctor. You must have lost about a liter of red ink, but it will do you no harm. The *bon Dieu* supplies fighting men with a reserve of blood. It is good to bleed when stabbed with a dirty weapon, for it lessens the chance of fever. I have washed out your wound with *eau oxygénée* and left a drain clear through. Nobody knows more about wounds than I, *pardi!*"

"The young ladies—" I whispered.

He gave a grunt.

"You are to forget the young ladies for the present. They are well enough, and appear to be in good accord. I don't know what is going to happen. Mlle. Grosvenor has nothing to say, and will do nothing about the silly business until her father regains his consciousness. I have told them they must keep out of here. Young ladies are all right as nurses during a patient's convalescence, but when there is fever they are too exciting."

He got up and hobbled over to the side of my bed.

"That *sacré* serpent! I was carrying the tent, and did not see him. If I had been alone, I might have died. Drink some of this. When we get back to Fort de France, I will make you a *tisane* from a native herb."

He gave me some sort of a draft, and laid his hand on my forehead.

"I am ashamed of having doubted your courage for a moment or two. I ought to have known that you were a fighting man, like myself. What a battle!" He licked his thin lips, and his cavernous eyes glowed. "That *voyou* that you spared described it

to us. If I could only have seen you knife that fellow in the rigging! *Sapristi*, but he must have hit the skylight with a thump! The brass rods were bent, and the deck looked like the floor of an *abattoir*. *Quel bonheur!*"

There came a rustle in the door. Two faces appeared around the edge of it—one white, with long black lashes fringing starry eyes, the other of a curious shade of yellow, for the stain was wearing off Carol also.

"Hello, girls!" I said. "What cheer?"

"Good cheer, Brambles, now that you're beginning to bramble again."

"*Allez vous en, mes demoiselles!*" growled Jean Baptiste. "You're too exciting." He slapped his hands at them. "*Hui! Sauvez vous, vite!*"

He shooped them out as if he was driving chickens from the kitchen of a French roadside inn.

"They are the devil, these young girls! The curious part about this pair is that although one is French and the other American, they look so much alike." He scratched his grizzled head. "Mlle. Grosvenor might almost be the younger sister of Mlle. Jasmine."

I turned and looked at him in astonishment. So the faithful old fellow knew nothing at all about the *raison d'être* of the affair! He had been exposing himself and his children to arrest and imprisonment in committing this lawless act for no other reason than that he had been ordered so to do by his former mistress. Here was loyalty for you—a feudal devotion that in our country we know nothing about.

"Now you'd better go to sleep again."

"But I'm hungry," I objected. "I've had no breakfast."

Jean Baptiste chuckled.

"It's evident that you will soon be well; but no food for the present—not while there is fever. Go to sleep. *Qui dort dine.*"

There was no arguing with the old martinet, so I eased myself on the sound side and went to sleep again.

When I awoke, it was dark. Evidently we had come to anchor, and it was probably the chain running out that had roused me. I felt well enough, except for the dull, burning pain in the severed muscles and a most consuming thirst. Somebody was talking in the saloon. I quickly recognized Dr. Morry's crisp, pleasant voice, and then Benton's.

"Hello!" I called.

They came in and turned on the lights. "Well, old chap!" said Benton cheerfully. "The next time I leave you anywhere, I'll chain you to the railing. The minute I turn my back, you buzz off and get yourself shot up or knifed or something."

Ito fetched hot water, and Dr. Morry rolled me over and made a swift examination of my wounds. I learned afterward that the big-bladed knife had followed the ribs around, cutting through the subscapular muscle and making a whale of a flesh wound.

"Fortunately the blade was clean," said the doctor; "and it couldn't have had a better first aid dressing."

"Of course not," croaked a voice from the doorway. "It was I, Jean Baptiste, who did it. Besides, you can't infect a man like that. His blood is too strong!"

"All the same," said Dr. Morry quietly, "I think we'll follow the war technique, and give him an injection of tetanus serum and the Carrel irrigation for the wound."

This treatment he proceeded to carry out. As he was making his preparation, I asked after Grosvenor, and was told that he was showing marked improvement. He was able to move his limbs a little, and seemed to be trying to speak; but the doctor did not anticipate any immediate recovery.

"The process would be gradual," he said. "Meanwhile the patient must be spared all excitement."

Benton told me that Carol had insisted on remaining aboard the yacht, whatever anybody might choose to think of it. Mme. Saint Cyr had been furious with Jasmine; but, according to Benton, this had no great importance.

"There's nothing much to do with girls like that," he said. "They have taken things into their own hands, and as Grosvenor is out of the running, and Mme. Saint Cyr practically *hors de combat*, what with worry and fatigue, I guess there's nothing to do but let them run the show."

"After all, it's their show," I said.

Benton had taken Dr. Morry into our confidence, and this sympathetic man of science was quite of our opinion. Moreover, like myself, he believed that there had been some fatal error in the beginning of the tragic affair.

Three days later, when my fever had left me, and I was trying to recover my strength and reinforce my vital fluid with more light and nourishing food than was ordained in

my régime, there came a curious partial dénouement.

I say "curious," though that is scarcely the word. It was actually almost ridiculous, because so simple. It proved what Jasmine had said about almost every affair, however serious, having its funny side if one could only find it, and if one had the sense of humor to appreciate it when found.

Carol had by this time constituted herself as my nurse, whether anybody approved the arrangement or not. It was clear to me that a very marked reconstruction had taken place in this willful damsel. She had become more serious, and had thrown aside her frivolous coquetting as she might have tossed away the *Columbine* costume worn at a masked ball. The habit of terse commentary—largely copied from her father, I imagine—still remained to give a sort of pungent spiciness to her observations upon things in general.

I had confided in Benton a good deal of my sentiments for Jasmine, and the hopelessness of the case.

"Oh, I don't know, old man," said he. "You can never tell what's going to happen these days. If things turn out as they ought, you might still have a look-in. After all, you've earned rather more than your stipend as sailing master."

"But what I've muddled through isn't a paid job," I objected.

"Well, then," he answered cheerfully, "it might lead somehow to another that would be!"

This suggested an entirely new train of thought; but to get back to Carol and her elimination of the most vexing problem of the business.

Benton came aboard that afternoon with quite a little party—Mme. Saint Cyr, Dr. Morry, Jasmine, and Señor de Gonzales. Carol received them with a sort of repressed air—a "millions for defense but not a cent for tribute" manner.

We had been sitting under the awning of the quarter-deck. Our housekeeping aboard had now been restored to perfect order. Benton had found us a cook and second steward, and Carol had offered sufficiently strong inducements to retain Hercule as quartermaster and Pensée as her maid.

She rose to receive our guests at the gangway. It was not her first meeting with Mme. Saint Cyr since her abduction, but heretofore their relations had been in the nature of an armistice.

Having seated her guests, Carol looked from one to the other of them with an expression that was sufficiently agreeable, but interrogatory. De Gonza was perspiring freely, more from embarrassment than heat, I fancied. Mme. Saint Cyr, on whom the whole episode had plainly etched its record, looked rather ill, but she bore herself with perfect self-possession, and with a tired rather than an antagonistic air.

"I have come to tell you, Miss Grosvenor," she said, "that Dr. Morry thinks your father may be able to talk intelligently at almost any hour. We believe that he is trying even now to ask after you, and that you had better be near him from this time on."

"That is urgently to be recommended," said Dr. Morry, with decision. "His brain must not be subjected to the slightest strain or distress."

"I hope, therefore," said Mme. Saint Cyr, in her cultured English, "that until your father recovers you will so far set aside all that has happened as to be my guest until he is able to leave us."

A curious little smile appeared on Carol's mouth. It turned one corner of it up and the other down, as if she were organized for mirth on one side of her face, and on the other for war. Her eyes, too, were similarly affected. That on the laughing side was wide open, while the lids of the other slightly narrowed, like one of those trick faces that you half cover longitudinally to get opposite effects of joy and sadness. I thought that she was up to mischief, and I was worried.

"Do you still believe me to be illegitimate?" she asked abruptly.

Mme. Saint Cyr crimsoned, and showed signs of mingled defensive hostility and a crushing fatigue. She had undoubtedly hoped to pigeonhole this accusation for the present. Count de Gonza seemed about to melt, and mopped his face with a sort of despairing gesture. As I glanced from him to Jasmine, I saw, with some perplexity, that her expression held a sort of unholy glee.

"You make it painful for me," said Mme. Saint Cyr, "but you ought to realize that if that had not been my conviction from the very beginning I should never have adopted such an arbitrary course of action."

Carol turned slowly and looked at the speaker with eyes that had gone as hard

as the sapphires they much resembled. She made a beautiful if somewhat astonishing figure, in her exquisite lace dress, with the peculiar golden red tint of her skin and her thick, fine hair ruddy and black and bronze in different patches. She had declined to use any solvent of the dye, for some reason—perhaps for this very occasion.

"'Arbitrary' is right," she said, "so far as it goes. 'Criminal' would be more truthfully complete. Do you realize, *madame*, what would have happened to Jasmine and me if Captain Fairfax had been surprised and killed, as he so narrowly missed being? Those fiends would have hid behind the bulwarks and killed Mr. Andersen and Ito as they came aboard, shooting them with the captain's revolver. Then they would have come ashore, six ravening beasts with two firearms, against your two unarmed servants, and Jean Baptiste crippled and scarcely able to stand. Can you imagine what would have happened then, Mme. Saint Cyr? Can you, Count de Gonza?"

Carol fixed her burning eyes on first the one and then the other. Mme. Saint Cyr had sunk back in her wicker deck chair. Her face was ashy. She looked for the moment to be on the verge of fainting. De Gonza had turned a sort of magenta color, like an eggplant. He looked as if he was about to follow Mr. Grosvenor's lead and have a stroke.

I was suddenly alarmed about him, and so was Dr. Morry, for he turned to Carol with an imploring gesture; but the girl was merciless, and I could not altogether blame her.

"Of course you can't imagine," she said contemptuously, "because you haven't got two *sous*' worth of imagination. If you had, you'd have guessed the truth before now. Well, I'll tell you what would have followed if it hadn't been for Captain Fairfax. These devils would have come ashore and made short work of the two men. Then, when they had finished with us women, they would have cut our throats, probably, or lugged us off aboard the yacht and kept us until they saw fit to strip and leave and scuttle her. We'd have gone down with her—and high time!"

"Carol!" I interrupted sharply. "That will do for that!"

She flashed me a bitter smile.

"All right, Brambles! Then that's that. It didn't happen, so what the deuce?" She

drew her handkerchief across her lips. "It isn't what I started to say, anyhow, but when she mentioned her 'arbitrary course of action' I couldn't help seeing red. As if she had sent Jasmine to her room, or something! I don't deny her claims. None of us deny them. We are all willing enough to acknowledge the truth of everything she says. I know that I am."

The effect of this outspoken and astonishing statement was immediate. Mme. Saint Cyr took a sudden breath and sat up in her chair.

"*Tiens! Tiens!*" muttered the count, suddenly leaning forward.

Jasmine, though still deathly white from the effect of Carol's withering invective, looked eagerly at her half sister, with an expression that was almost one of excited amusement.

Mme. Saint Cyr managed to find voice enough to ask tremulously:

"Am I to understand that you acknowledge Jasmine to be Mr. Grosvenor's legitimate daughter?"

"Of course I do," Carol answered, almost impatiently. "I know my father too well to believe him capable of going around fathering illegitimate daughters and then abandoning them and their mothers to poverty and distress. He's a just man, and a kind man, and incidentally a gentleman. He hates that sort of thing!"

She looked at me and winked, but the others did not notice the wink. They were too much flabbergasted.

"Then, in that case," cried Mme. Saint Cyr, "who and what are you?"

Carol turned slowly, and gave her a look so charged with insolence that it brought the color to the older woman's cheeks.

"Oh, I'm a bet you overlooked," the girl said. "I can't say more without insulting you, and I rather dislike doing that to a guest. Still"—she seemed to brighten—"since you insist on claiming my illegitimacy, then according to you this is *your* yacht, and in that case you're the hostess, not I; so I may be justified in telling you what I think of you—and that fat gargoyle over there!" She jerked her streaky head at Señor de Gonza. "I think you are a pair of dangerous boneheads!"

"Carol, stop it, for Heaven's sake!" I protested. "If you can clear this rotten business up, then go to it. We've had enough of war and of war talk."

Mme. Saint Cyr turned dazedly to me.

"But this extraordinary girl has acknowledged that Jasmine is Mr. Grosvenor's legitimate daughter—"

"Of course she is," Carol interrupted; "and so am I."

Mme. Saint Cyr looked suddenly alarmed. It must have flashed across her mind that Carol's treatment had driven her insane, and that all this was raving which might at any moment become physically as well as verbally violent; but I began to see a ray of light. The poor old count had got past the stage of seeing anything, or even hearing much.

And then came Carol's *coup de théâtre*. She turned to Mme. Saint Cyr and asked abruptly, almost roughly:

"How old is Jasmine, anyhow?"

"She will be twenty-one next March, but—"

"K'you!" said Carol, with a brisk rising inflexion. "Well, then, stepmother dear, I shall be twenty-three next Christmas Day. I may not look it, but if you doubt my word you can search the New York archives of superfluous kids for that year. Jasmine looks about three years older than myself, because she's dark and tropical, and I'm fair and slow to sprout. My gray matter developed first, you see!"

"Then—then"—Mme. Saint Cyr turned deathly pale—"you mean to tell me that you were already born when—when—"

"Better than that, deary," Carol answered ironically. "You see, stepmamma, my own mother gave her precious life for my worthless one on the day that I was born. Dad placed me *en nourrice* with his sister. He came down here to try to find distraction from his grief, and it would appear that he succeeded. No doubt he kept his former marriage secret from you because he was afraid you would think him heartless. Then, having had some convincing reason to believe that you had been destroyed and buried by the eruption of Mont Pelée, he never told anybody about his marriage to you. You will have to ask him about that when he recovers. I think you'll find that he learned the truth quite recently, and came here to make good. The point is this, however—I am certainly legitimate, and I firmly believe Jasmine to be legitimate also, because I know my father to be a man of heart as well as a man of honor. Nobody is going to dispute Jasmine's claim. So you kicked up all this row for nothing—and there you are!"

She stopped abruptly. Dr. Morry sprang up from his chair. Mme. Saint Cyr had fainted.

XXVI

CAROL returned to their villa with Mme. Saint Cyr and Jasmine. Having freely unburdened her mind of its congested and cumulative resentment, she announced herself as quite willing to bury the hatchet. It struck me that she had already done so—in Mme. Saint Cyr's head; but such was Carol.

When they had all gone, Benton and I went down to supper. He had accepted my invitation to remain aboard for the night. For the first time, I found him quiet and a little moody.

"What a girl!" he murmured, as he unfolded his napkin. "What a wonderful girl!"

"She's all of that and more," I agreed. "She's a full-powered grown-up woman when she wants to be."

"Extraordinary none of us ever thought of that before—of Jasmine's being the younger," said Benton.

"You might have thought of it," I said, "because you are used to quick-ripening tropic fruits. I would have been willing to swear that Jasmine was twenty-four, at least. Carol's speech and general behavior and schoolgirlishness, with her short skirts and bobbed hair, put her at about eighteen or nineteen from my viewpoint—and everybody else's, for that matter."

Benton nodded.

"You can't estimate the age of American girls any more. You get mixed up between the juvenile arms and legs and heads and the hard, sophisticated speech. Jasmine strikes one as older, not only because she is dark and has a thoughtful expression, but because of her poise. There's a sort of quiet sureness about her, and of course she's more physically mature than Carol. The age discrepancy is something that would never have occurred to me."

"I might have guessed," I said, "because I've had a sample of Carol's maturity of mind. I thought her precocious, but I see now that she was merely experienced; and I must say that she doesn't bother about dispensing mercy with her justice."

"Well, can you blame her?" Benton demanded. "Look what they did to her—and the worst of it was that the whole business was based on an insult to her father

and herself. She would have forgiven them quicker if it had been a straight case of kidnaping for a ransom."

"All the same," I said, "she might have considered a little what Mme. Saint Cyr has already suffered."

Benton shook his head.

"Mme. Saint Cyr forfeited all consideration to that by subjecting Carol to danger and indignity, to say nothing of having been the direct cause of her father's stroke. Carol took it out in this way, telling them just what she thought about it all. Another person in her position would have refused to see them at all, or would have had them sent to jail."

"Speaking of jail," I said, "has that convict been sent back to Cayenne?"

"No," said Benton. "I think you can save him that, if you really want to do a bit of lying. I've talked to him, and I must say I feel sorry for him. If you care to make a perfectly untruthful deposition that he surrendered himself when he might easily have killed you and made his escape, the chances are he'll be paroled, and in time pardoned, if he behaves himself."

"Well, it might be the truth at that," I answered. "I was nearly all in, and perhaps he could have got away with it. If he'd smashed me, then crouched behind the bulwarks and whaled Andersen over the head as he stepped on deck, he could have got his gun and shot Ito and Hercule. After that he'd only have had to knock out a shackle, slip his cable, and get away to sea."

"It's up to you," said Benton. "As a matter of fact, I think it would be a mistake to interfere. The French criminal law is not so severe as it is consistent, and it's a pretty safe bet, nowadays, that any man who finds himself deported to Cayenne belongs there."

"All the same, I'm going to try and get him off," I said. "He served aboard one of the French patrol fleet that was working with my crowd, and that says a lot to me. I remember one day, when our little flagship had just hoisted the signal to make our turn, and a big German sub—'Pen-march Pete,' we called him—popped up about a mile away. He might have got the lot of us, but this little French gamecock of an obsolete *torpilleur* tore after him, and may or may not have got him with a depth bomb for all I know. This chap was an engine room mechanic on that hooker."

"Well, stick that in," said Benton. "Everybody's feeling lenient these days."

We got talking then about the two girls again, and I presently discovered that Benton—that clean-cut, good-looking, and efficient trader—had fallen head over heels in love with Carol. He took it rather sadly.

"Oh, what's the use?" he said. "I'm nobody to speak of—except, perhaps, on Martinique, and this sort of place wouldn't do for her!"

"Not forever, perhaps," I said; "but your chance is a lot better than mine—which doesn't say anything at all. You draw a good salary and commissions. Even if your wife was rich, you would be quite independent of her fortune. I've got just nothing at all to offer."

Benton laughed.

"Then why not play true to form, and offer just that? Try to get an option, anyway. After all, you saved their lives, so look at it from the Oriental point of view, which is that if you save a life, you are responsible for the future welfare of the individual saved."

He leaned forward and slapped the table with his hand.

"Strike while the iron's hot, old chap! Mme. Saint Cyr is too badly flattened out to make any active opposition, and unless I'm much mistaken she'll be flatter still as soon as Grosvenor comes back to his senses. Carol is right—Grosvenor never intended to abandon his wife. I'll wager there was some sort of dirty work that still has to be cleaned up."

We argued this throughout our meal. Later in the evening Benton helped me draw up my deposition asking a parole for the convict, one Alphonse Figuiet—which, I may say in passing, was subsequently approved.

There were depositions to make in regard to the other convicts, and I spent all the next morning and part of the afternoon in the Palais de Justice, with Benton and several officials. The whole story was given them in detail, and it was decided that no action should be taken unless the injured parties—Mr. Grosvenor, Carol, and myself—saw fit to bring charges. The whole affair was, in fact, to be considered as one of those *crimes passionelles* with which the French law deals so leniently, preferring to leave them for adjustment with the parties concerned, where this is possible, and if there is no corpse to "sit upon."

I was also assured that there would be no publicity, no scandal, as the French, unlike ourselves, strictly forbid the reporting of such cases and the washing of domestic linen in public.

Late in the afternoon I walked up the hill, ostensibly to inquire after Mr. Grosvenor. Mme. Saint Cyr had taken Carol for a ride in the car put at her disposition by the count—a good sign, I thought, and one that seemed to promise the establishment of friendly relations. Jasmine was alone, except for the two nurses detailed for the case—two highly efficient young women with war experience.

"He seems just on the verge of coming round," Jasmine told me. "He knew Carol, and reached up and kissed her; but Dr. Morry is anxious. He says that Mr. Grosvenor's heart is very bad."

Jasmine insisted that I should stay for supper. We went out into the garden to wait for the others. It was a sort of natural garden, a riot of wonderful plants and flowering shrubs and bushes which had been pretty well left to adjust relations for themselves, and which appeared to be managing it in perfectly good accord.

We seated ourselves on a bench against a little orange tree in all stages of productivity. I could not help thinking what it would be like if Jasmine were to stand beside me with her hand in mine, and with a wreath of those white, fragrant blossoms in her hair.

"What are you sighing about?" she asked.

On the impulse of the moment I played true to form, as Benton had advised, and told her what was in my mind. To my confusion, she turned her head slowly, gave me a level look, and asked in her thrilling voice:

"Then why not, sir?"

For a moment I could not speak. Then I said:

"Oh, Jasmine, dear, what's the use of asking? There are so many 'why nots' that I shouldn't know where to begin!"

"Then don't begin," said Jasmine softly. "Since you are so modest, I shall say it for you, sir. We owe all the good that has come out of this to you. If *maman* had kept Carol prisoner, she would never, never have forgiven us, nor do I think that her father would have done so. You are right in saying that they are not the sort of people to be coerced."

"I have absolutely nothing to offer you," I said. "No home, no money, not even any prospects."

"But if things turn out as we have reason to hope," said Jasmine, "all that should be the least of our cares. You have your abilities, and if, like most Americans, you insist on some sort of business affairs, it ought not to be so difficult." She looked at me with sorrowful eyes, in which I caught the slightest note of mockery. "I'm afraid, captain, that you love your pride and your freedom more than you do me!"

"I have never loved any woman before," I said, "and I shall never love any woman again; but there's no telling when I may be in a position to ask you to marry me—if ever. It would not be right for me to ask you to wait."

"But what if I do not want to wait?" said Jasmine. "Do you think that I should have nothing to say about it? Oh, dear!" She gave a little laugh. "What must you think of me? Here we are already arguing about being married, when there has not been any courtship at all!"

"Not in words, perhaps," I answered, "nor in any exchange of sentiments; but my radio has been sizzling and crackling away from the moment I first laid eyes on your portrait. Being what you are, I don't think that you could help but get a lot of it on your receiver."

Jasmine nodded.

"Perhaps that was the reason I was so furious, that day on the road, when I looked into your car and saw Carol overcome."

"That was awful," I said.

Jasmine gave a little shudder.

"I felt as if I wanted to kill you both. That was why I made no further opposition to my mother's plan. I thought you must be two unutterable beasts!"

"When did you change your mind?" I asked.

"When you stood there and chaffed *maman* as she was on the verge of killing you."

"You wanted her to kill me?" I asked. She nodded.

"Yes, at first. I could not bear the thought that any man should have seen me as you did, and live."

"I didn't look at you," I muttered.

I reflected that here was another creature of the passionate isle, sweetly soft in its outer aspect, yet molten underneath, like its volcano with green plantations and pink almond blossoms on its slopes.

"And then—" I asked.

Jasmine raised her hands to her temples.

"At the first shot I saw that I was wrong about you—when you swayed a little, and then taunted *maman* on her poor marksmanship. At the second shot I thought I should die; but I didn't dare to interfere, because I knew how terrible *maman* can be, and I could see that she was affected by your nonchalance. I felt that only that could save you, and that I mustn't break the spell of it."

"You're right," I said. "I never was nearer death."

"Your will was the stronger," said Jasmine, "because it was steady, and *maman's* is short and violent. It is torrential, like our showers. I knew then, as I looked at you, that Edmée had not told the truth, that I had been wrong in thinking you a beast, and that you had not come there to spy on me."

I reached for her hand and held it tightly clasped in both of mine.

"You are still very young, Jasmine," I said. "Would you be willing to give me a little time to see what I can accomplish?"

"And what do you call a little time, sir?" she asked.

"Three years," I answered. "Five years, perhaps."

"What?" she gasped. "You call that a little time? It's an eternity, as we measure time on Martinique!" She freed her hand, then dropped both hands on my shoulders and looked up into my face. "I'll give you three *weeks* if you like—or five, perhaps!"

There came from the front the purr of a motor and the whine of brakes.

"There are *maman* and Carol," Jasmine said. "They're getting better friends."

"Your mother would never let you marry me," I said. "Neither would Mr. Grosvenor give his consent."

"I'm not so sure," said Jasmine; "but after all, what right would they have to forbid it, after the frightful mess they made of things? I think they were both to blame."

"Yes," I agreed. "They ought never to have accepted such a dispensation without making at least an effort to know for sure that it was final. Your father should have come to Martinique, and your mother should have gone to him, if only for your sake. I think that she was actually the more to blame, because she knew that he was still alive, while I am convinced that

he believed her to have been destroyed and buried in pumice and ashes."

"And yet," said Jasmine, "you talk of a separation of five years for us!"

Her arms slipped along my shoulders, her hands clasping behind my neck. With that exquisite face so close to mine, and the pulsing contact of her, I felt my resolution slipping.

Then, as my own arms went up to clasp her close, there came from the house a piercing shriek. Jasmine and I sprang to our feet. We heard a confusion of voices and the scurrying of feet. Jasmine, deathly white, gripped my arm with both hands. I think that both of us knew that instant the tragedy that had occurred.

A white-clad nurse came flying down the ragged little path.

"*Mademoiselle!*" she wailed. "Oh, *mademoiselle!*"

"Here!" I called. "What has happened, nurse?"

The young woman crossed herself.

"He heard the voice of *madame*, and sat up suddenly as she came into the room. 'It is Eulalie!' he cried. 'My Eulalie!'—and then he fell back dead!"

XXVII

I STOPPED for Benton on the way back, and told him what had happened. He whistled softly.

"Dr. Morry was afraid of that," said he. "What a shame that he couldn't have lived long enough to have recognized his wife and daughter officially! If he had only said 'My wife,' it would have helped a lot."

"A fitting end for a life's tragedy," I said bitterly.

Benton nodded.

"It's as much for the sake of Mme. Saint Cyr's and Jasmine's position as for their share of the estate," he said. "The chances are that after what she said the other day Carol will offer to divide the fortune. If Mme. Saint Cyr accepts, it will be an admission of her claim to it, and such a claim, without documentary or personal evidence, would lay her open to the attack of vicious tongues. That is precisely what she regulated her whole life to avoid. She has all the pride of her race, and I very much doubt if she would be willing, even for Jasmine's sake, to accept what is due her under the existing circumstances."

I had thought of that, of course, and was bound to admit that Benton was right. He

was a little less than right, in fact, for there was also Jasmine's pride to be reckoned with, no less than that of her mother.

"According to the French procedure," Benton continued, "there'll be seals put on all the personal property of the deceased, until the *notaire* takes inventory. I'll make my consular report of the death as soon as the bureau opens, but meanwhile we'll go around and see Maitre Sandre, my company's counsel. He's the main guy here in legal circles. It's for Dr. Morry to make his report at the Prefecture."

So the usual red tape was duly affixed, even to the safe in Mr. Grosvenor's room aboard the yacht, and to all the drawers and lockers that might contain papers or articles of value. I was permitted to remain aboard with the crew. There was, of course, no difficulty for Carol in regard to funds. On the receipt of the cablegrams announcing her father's death, the executors of his estate immediately deposited a sum to her credit in the Royal Bank of Canada at Fort de France.

Carol bore up bravely under the loss of a kind and indulgent parent, whom she had dearly loved. She had, of course, been in some measure prepared for what had happened by Dr. Morry. The deeper kindness of her nature now came uppermost, as she offered no recriminations to Mme. Saint Cyr for having been the direct cause of the tragedy.

Nevertheless, Mme. Saint Cyr was prostrated. She accused herself of being a murderer, and became so distraught that we were all seriously alarmed. Jasmine, also, was profoundly distressed.

I went to the villa the following afternoon and found the two girls sitting by the bedside of Mme. Saint Cyr. Considerably to my surprise, Carol insisted that I should come in. She had succeeded in quieting Jasmine's mother, who was listening to what Carol said with a drawn, haggard face.

"We might as well face the situation sensibly," said Carol, in a cool and even voice. "I am thoroughly convinced that dear daddy learned only recently that he had a living wife and daughter here, and that he came to Martinique for the express purpose of claiming them. That was his reason for insisting that I should accompany him. He wanted to clear up the whole tragic affair, and he felt that he had very little time in which to do it."

"And I, by my wicked, abominable act,

shortened even that!" moaned Mme. Saint Cyr.

"I don't blame you," said Carol. "After all you had suffered you were scarcely responsible. Dr. Morry says that with a heart so organically diseased he could not have lived more than a few months longer, at the most."

Mme. Saint Cyr moaned again.

"If only I had spoken to him the day he came ashore!"

"That might have had the same effect," Carol said; "and then I would have felt differently about it all." She took the hand of the stricken woman gently in her own. "You must not blame yourself, my dear. The specialists at home warned me that the slightest sudden emotion or physical exertion might easily carry him off. If he had found you that day, when I am sure he went to look for you, the result would probably have been the same; and that would have been worse, because you would not have had my support."

"Carol is right, *madame*," I said. "And as it has happened, you three have come to a better understanding."

We left Mme. Saint Cyr somewhat comforted and resting quietly. When we were seated on the terrace, Carol said with her characteristic abruptness:

"Jasmine has told me how things are with you two, Brambles. I wish you all joy and happiness, from the bottom of my heart. You two were just created for each other."

"But, Carol, hold on!" I protested. "This is premature. It will be years before I can hope to ask Jasmine to marry me, if ever."

"Nonsense!" said Carol. "Don't be so tiresomely noble. Can't you take a lesson from all this? Grab your happiness when you get the chance, and swing onto it. Who knows what might happen in the years and years you're mauling about? See what they did to dad and Mme. Saint Cyr—or Mme. Grosvenor, to be exact. I know what you're thinking about, but that doesn't enter into it. Of course, I shall divide poor dear daddy's fortune with Jasmine and her mother. There's quite enough for ail of us, I guess."

The tears gushed into her eyes. Jasmine flung her arms about her.

"Don't talk of that, Carol dear," she said. "For one thing, it's not to be thought of. You must see the awkward position it

would put us in; but don't let's think about it now."

"No, let's not," I said. "I may be a soldier of fortune, but I'm not a hunter of money. Anyhow, it wouldn't do, as Jasmine says."

"Well, who's talking about it now?" Carol interrupted, winking away her tears. "You two make me tired! I'm not trying to play *Lady Bountiful*, or the fairy god-mother, or any of those bland, complacent things. All I want is to carry out what I know to have been dad's intentions. You can't get away from that, can you? Let's go down aboard the yacht. I've got to get some black gowns and—and things."

She burst into a storm of tears. Such was Carol, hard-hearted and tender-hearted, rough-spoken even in her grief.

We were met by Benton, who told us that the officials desired to go aboard the yacht to make an inventory and examine the contents of the safe. Carol said that her father had given her the combination, and that she had it in a little hiding place of her writing desk. So we all went off together, quite a party of us, to take official steps that we might do well to emulate at home—to protect the property of the rightful heirs, who, crushed or shaken, are often not quite up to repelling the raids of plundering relatives and other vultures.

In this case the proceeding was perfunctory except for the contents of the safe, where it was very possible that important documents might be found. Carol gave the combination to Benton, who quickly had the contents exposed. Among the very first of these we, who were looking over the vice consul's shoulder, saw a large square envelope tied up with a packet of papers, and the whole addressed "to my daughter, Carol Grosvenor."

Carol slipped the knot of the voluminous packet and spread the papers on the center table, for Mr. Grosvenor's room was a large one, taking up a whole section of the yacht from the main companionway to the engine room bulkhead. This last was a double partition, proof against heat and noise by reason of a ventilated air space.

"I don't feel quite up to going through all this, Mr. Benton," Carol said. "Please glance it over and give us a brief of it."

Benton opened the big envelope.

"The will," he said.

Then, as his eyes ran down the docu-

ment, they lightened suddenly and grew intent. He looked at us and smiled.

"It is just as we expected," said he, speaking in French for the benefit of the officials. "Mr. Grosvenor came here for the express purpose of claiming the wife whom he had believed to have been destroyed more than twenty years ago. The bulk of his fortune, aside from some few legacies, is bequeathed one-third to his lawful wife, Eulalie Grosvenor, and the other two-thirds divided equally between his two daughters."

Benton picked up a long envelope and handed it to Carol.

"This is a personal letter to you, Miss Grosvenor. The will was drawn up in due legal form before he left New York, and this document is the duplicate. It is evident that he had learned the circumstances of his wife and daughter, no doubt recently. And here is some correspondence from"—he examined the signature—"one Commandant Gaston Berthereau."

I saw a quick look of recognition exchanged between the French officials. Benton handed the correspondence to Maître Sandre.

"Please look through these, *maître*," said he, "and let us have their contents."

For several moments there was silence, Carol reading this last communication from her father, while Maître Sandre, with signs of agitation, quickly scanned through the letters given him by Benton. Carol was the first to speak.

"It is just as we thought," said she. "My dear father had not the slightest knowledge of the existence of his wife and daughter until about a month before we sailed. He knew, also, that he had not much longer to live. The confession contained in these letters struck him like an avalanche. After receiving them, he asked no more than the time to come here and, as he says, 'put his house in order.'"

Maître Sandre, a handsome man with the finished diction that is one of the most important qualifications of the French barrister, rose to his feet with the letters in hand. Before proceeding to read them, he made a preface of his own, and it was masterly—an apologia. He analyzed the psychology of the writer—a valiant soldier, who before Verdun, where he felt that he was destined to fall, had made his confession and such late amends as lay in his power for what was actually a very dreadful act.

Maître Sandre, with beautiful rhetoric and in a vibrant voice, dwelt upon the obsession of this man by his consuming love for Eulalie, *née* Beauharnais, before and after her marriage to Grosvenor, and upon his honest conviction that her husband was a worthless foreigner who was destined to make her life a wretched one, through his lack of appreciation of her fineness and his dissolute habits. Hoping that Eulalie, although a devout Catholic, might be able to get a dispensation for the annulment of her marriage, if she thought herself ruthlessly deserted, Berthereau had sent lying cablegrams, had destroyed Eulalie's letters, and later had gone to New York. There, in an interview with Grosvenor, he had told the American that his wife had been destroyed and incinerated in the conflagration, with all of her immediate kin.

Later, knowing nothing of Grosvenor's access of fortune, he had kept his secret—partly because he honestly thought Eulalie better off without such a husband as he considered Grosvenor to be, and partly because he lived always in hope of her yielding to his pleadings. Maître Sandre did not see fit to touch upon what I suspected might also be a strong motive for the silence of the *commandant*—his probable disgrace and expulsion from the army for such an abominable deception.

Not until many years afterward, when before Verdun he felt himself doomed, did he write this full confession and direct that it should be forwarded to Grosvenor after his death. The certainty of the soldier's fate had not been established until about a year after the armistice; and the document, having been put away in some nook or cranny, had not been discovered until after the death of the person to whom it had been confided.

Grosvenor's letter to Carol, translated into French by Benton, explained all this. It seemed that he had buried the brief episode of his marriage to Eulalie as a tragic event in a train of adverse circumstances that had overwhelmed him at that time.

Carol's mother had died in giving birth to her daughter. Grosvenor's father had broken with him for his bad habits, and for this first marriage, which he disapproved. The son—pretty deeply in the slough, I imagine—had gone on a West Indian voyage for his health. Becoming interested in Martinique, and speaking French from childhood, he had managed to borrow a

little money, and had started a sugar-planting and distilling venture there.

Then he met and fell in love with the beautiful Eulalie Beauharnais, who, as she herself had already told me, persuaded her family to consent to a secret marriage, in order to avoid antagonizing a suitor who had advanced money to Grosvenor. Their prospects were brightening when Grosvenor was summoned back to the deathbed of his father, who at the end forgave him and re-installed him as principal heir. Two days after he sailed came the eruption of Mont Pelée and, as Grosvenor was deceived into believing, the annihilation of his bride and of the business that he was building up. He later returned the money he had borrowed, but Eulalie had never been informed of this.

One could scarcely blame Grosvenor very much after first listening to Maître Sandre's moving apology for the man who had been his friend, and then to Grosvenor's defense of his own desire to blot out this tragic past. He believed Eulalie's remains to have been incinerated as if by cremation. Moreover, religious rites for all thus destroyed had been performed by the high clergy of the Catholic Church. He had known nothing at all of Jasmine until the receipt of Berthereau's confession.

So here was the evidence all in, the tragic mysteries explained and duly condoned, as Maître Sandre summoned up the train of fatal catastrophes:

"Of the dead, let us say nothing but good. *Requiescat in pace!*"

XXVIII

AND so to the dawn of a new and brighter day. Fresh foliage springs up through the ashes of the conflagration where even some few units of robust growth may still survive, seared at heart, perhaps, but still vigorous and verdant.

Carol, that clear-headed and competent girl beneath her veneer of frivolity, outlined a sensible course of action for the immediate future. A tremendous change had been effected in her. Her strange experiences seemed to have rubbed off her cheap and tawdry surface affectations, revealing the fine, strong fiber underneath, like wiping off the paint with which the ancient Greeks saw fit to embellish the columns of their beautiful marble temples.

"I think we have all had about enough of Martinique, for the present at least," said she. "The island is all right now that Pelée

has done its worst, but the eruption has scarred us pretty badly. We need to go somewhere to heal our wounds, and we don't any of us like going on a stuffy steamer to rub shoulders with a lot of chattering passengers."

This was after the funeral of Mr. Grosvenor—for he had expressed in his will a desire to be interred where death might overtake him, and a repugnance to the idea of his remains being freighted to some other place.

"I therefore propose," said Carol, "that we go aboard the yacht and let our gallant captain sail us to some peaceful place where we can spend the rest of the winter. Then we can go North in the spring."

This plan seemed good. Carol, who knew our Southern resorts, finally decided on Ormond.

"We shall be in mourning," she said, "and shan't have to mix with the gay crowd, while at the same time we can get some distraction from it."

I suggested that we might break the voyage by going *via* Jamaica. The prevailing winds were favorable in this direction, and I could cable to New York and have the spare parts of the motor waiting for us at Kingston.

This plan was approved, so in due time we bade farewell to the passionate isle and our friends upon it, of whom the most stricken at our going were Benton and Count de Gonza; but I had a presentiment that good things might yet be in the future for these two.

In the words of the Indian arrow maker, "pleasant was the journey homeward." The spirits of the party rose as the flaming island, with its pulsing light and mystic mountains, was dissolved in the blue of distance. Fresh and favorable breezes wafted us on our way, as one has only to glance at the pilot chart of Central American waters and observe its "wind roses" to appreciate.

The Integrity, now fully entitled to the name given her by her late owner, was an excellent sailer, and I had a splendid crew—old Jean Baptiste and his sons, Hercule and Achille, and some fishermen of their acquaintance.

The tall schooner walked through those indigo waters with a sort of stately tread, as if she, too, had suffered blood and wounds—which was indeed the case, with the *sabotage* to her engine and the carnage on her

decks. I think that a sort of profound peacefulness settled on us all, a *dolce far niente* that was healing and sweet.

I tried to tell myself that I was living in a fool's paradise, enveloped in a rosy dream from which I must presently awake; but little by little it became impressed upon me that perhaps it might not be a dream, or, if so, it might be one from which I need never awaken.

To my considerable astonishment, Mrs. Grosvenor told me in a most straightforward manner that she saw no reason why Jasmine and I should not marry.

"I feel as if we owe you everything, *mon cher*," she said. "If you had not felt that we had some justification, and acted accordingly, there is no telling what might have happened. I owe you something, too, for my first maltreatment of you."

Carol was more emphatic.

"I see now why dad was so anxious that you should be our sailing master. He knew that he was not for very long, and he wanted somebody to whom he could intrust me if the blow were to fall suddenly. Dad was a tremendous stickler for race; and I'm inclined to think that he had some other sort of slant on you through friends. Dad was one of those men who seem to know everything about everybody, and he had the faculty of sizing up a person at first sight. The chances are he never made but one mistake, and that was a fatal one. So if you want to play the fool and miss the chance of your life's happiness, that's your own affair!"

"I don't intend to miss it," I protested. "Jasmine will wait."

"Wait where?" Carol asked. "Back there on Martinique with her mother?"

"Of course not," I said. "Wherever they feel like living—probably in France."

"Well, they're not going to live in France," said Carol shortly. "Mme. Saint Cyr is going back, in due time, to reward old Señor de Gonza's long devotion by marrying him. She would have done that long ago if she had been free; but as a devout Catholic she would not get a divorce. Besides, she had no proof of any marriage to be divorced from. She likes Martinique, and they'll probably live there in the good season and in Caracas or Buenos Aires the rest of the time; but that plan doesn't suit Jasmine at all."

"What does she want to do?" I asked.

"I've asked her to come and live with

me," said Carol. "She'll take kindly to my sort of life, once you're disposed of in some swamp or other."

A cold chill struck through me.

"Jasmine would hate that sort of thing," I said. "She's not that kind."

"Oh, thank you so much!" Carol shot me a mocking look. "She'll like it well enough, once she gets acclimated. Any real live girl would. Jasmine has never had any fun at all, and she'll take to our American indoor and outdoor sports like a bird to free air. Being sore with you will help. I can hardly wait to see the splash she's going to make with my crowd! They're not such a bad old bunch, after all, if the pace is a little swift."

I could feel my inner machinery groaning and grinding. My disturbing sense of visualization could picture these two girls, with their beauty and wealth and high dynamic energy, proceeding unrestrained in the sort of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness to which Carol threatened to return.

It struck me suddenly that after all no permanent cure had been affected in Carol. I remembered how bored she had become out on the island. Now that she was free from the restraining influence of her father, slight as this had been, what was there to govern her at all?

It was not as if Carol's had been a feeble, yielding nature. Feverish excitement was a sort of food for her. She did not succumb to the temptation of it. She deliberately went out after it, and now she purposed to initiate Jasmine.

"You see, Brambles," said Carol, "Jasmine and I are two orphans adrift in the same boat. Since we've both lost our captain, we've got to steer it as best we know how."

"How lost your captain?" I demanded.

"Well, haven't we? You spurned me over on the island, when I wanted to kiss and make up according to the worst traditions of current fiction and drama. Now you tell Jasmine that she'll have to drift around the best she can for the next three, five, or a hundred years, until such time as you see fit to take her in tow. So we'll drift together—unless somebody else takes us in tow meanwhile. We might be captured by well dressed convicts, for all we know—and no one there to slaughter them!"

My machinery began to heat. Carol's allegory had been exact. It did not need the imagination of which I no longer had the

right to boast to picture precisely that thing. Carol knew the troubled waters of her high social latitudes, but to plunge Jasmine into them would be like trolling a bright goldfish, taken from its globe, through a school of barracudas.

All at once I saw the situation from a different slant. This image of the future so roughly sketched by Carol gave me, if possible, a greater jolt than when I had turned to see the spawn of devils from the island of that name bearing down upon me. At that moment I had been very much on deck, but there was no telling where I might be when some plausible pirate tried to snatch my tropic flower.

Money be hanged! Pride be crammed into a pocket with a hole in it! I looked aft to where Jasmine was curled up on the cushions of the stern overhang. It was a starry night, and Hercule was at the wheel.

"This sort of thing can't last forever," said Carol, and turned to the companionway. "But you should worry about Jasmine and me! I'm going to keep the yacht, but I think I'll change her name to Propriety, or Virtue, or Conventionality, before Jasmine and I start on our European cruise next summer. It seems to be the modern custom to wear a camouflage like that for what goes on aboard. We'll have a deaf mute skipper, and the crew's uniform will include blinders and bells!"

"Is that your best idea of a good time?" I growled.

Carol turned, with one hand on the rim of the sliding hatch and one foot on the first step of the companionway.

"I can't swear to that, Brambles—it's too far away. We may have a good time, or we may have a bad time; but one thing is certain"—her smile looked positively wicked in the dark—"we'll have a time!"

I strode aft, to where Jasmine was cuddled on the cushions. I dropped down beside her and took both her hands in mine—roughly, I'm afraid, for she sat suddenly upright.

"What's the matter, sir? Your hands are cold as ice."

"I'm cold all through," I said. "Carol has just frozen me by outlining your joint future. Good Lord! What's the use of getting myself carved and shot up trying to save you two from one danger, only to see you fall into a worse? This time I can't save you both. The law's against it, and besides, I don't want to. Carol can take care of herself. She's older and knows the ropes."

"What are you talking about?" cried Jasmine.

"You!" I answered, and drew her closer. "Just only you! That's about all I'm going to talk about or think about or act about from this time on, if you'll let me!"

Eight bells—midnight struck.

"Bright lookout ahead, sir!" came from the bow.

THE END

ALCHEMISTS OF NIGHT

THE little wind has gone to sleep
Upon the shoulder of the hill;
The alchemists of night distill
From dew-drenched earth their magic deep.

Here is a hedge, with opals hung,
That glints and gleams with sudden fire;
There, o'er the juniper's tall spire,
The mist an iris veil has flung.

In yonder pool of chrysoprase
One topaz like a living flame,
Confined as in a mirror's frame,
Reflects the beauty of its rays.

The far choirs hymn invisible;
Faint fragrances rise from the mold,
And all the picture turns to gold;
Night's alchemists have wrought their spell.

Pierre Vivant

The Girl from Pengarry

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE ADVENTURES OF A GIRL WHO
HAD ILLUSIONS AND FOUND THEM DANGEROUS

By A. L. Kimball

CHRISTINE BOND stumbled along in the irritating Pengarry slush by the side of a tall, quiet-faced young man, who now and then bent to ask if she was tired. They were returning from the funeral of Christine's aunt, and they were walking because the girl, who now faced the world absolutely on her own responsibility, refused to ride in the same hack with Pengarry mourners.

The harder Pengarry tried to understand Christine, the more definite became the girl's withdrawal. Fifteen years before, when she first had been brought to the careful Eastern town, they had called her an odd child. Now it was whispered that she seemed an ungrateful little beggar.

Christine at five had been an interesting problem. Christine at twenty was a dangerous puzzle still unsolved. To Pengarry minds, any pretty girl so wholly dependent upon the ungrudging bounty of her one remaining relative should have been at least understandable.

To-day the excitement of a first real independence had brightened her eyes, and she was enjoying the long walk from the cemetery with spiteful zest. The uncertain flurry of a March snowstorm now and then slapped her wet skirts against the man's knees. She turned a reddened, dripping face to him, and laughed.

"Why do you punish yourself?" she taunted. "I didn't want you to walk through the snow."

Philip Strome smiled a quiet response.

"I like to walk," he said; "and you shouldn't stay in that house alone, not as you are feeling to-day."

"How am I feeling?"

"I am going to let you tell me after we build a fire in the library."

"I shall not feel as reasonable then as I

do now. I hate that library. I have hated it for fifteen years!"

"It's to be different now."

"Yes, it is; but Pengarry isn't to have any finger in it!" She darted a defiant look at the sober face above her, and saw only a wistful kindness which drove her into further revolt. "If people would only stop trying to cut and mold me! It's my life I'm living."

"Let's not talk now," he pleaded.

"I don't see why we should talk at all. I've fully made up my mind what I'm going to do."

"I'm glad."

She looked up quickly. Her brown eyes narrowed at the corners, and twinkled.

"It isn't anything you'll approve."

He did not wince, as she expected, and as she really desired, but continued to guide her gently through the treacherous, slippery snow until they reached a low, drab house with close drawn shutters. The girl shivered a little.

"Have I got to go in there even once again?"

Strome drew nearer and reached for the small bag that dangled from her arm. He found the familiar key and unlocked the front door.

They walked through the stiff, brown-papered hall to the dingy library. Christine stood still on the threshold. Her slender young body seemed to shrink from the room.

"I can't go in there!" she shuddered.

"Must I talk with you?"

"I believe you must, Christine. Is there any room you like better?"

A challenge shot from her eyes.

"My own room isn't so bad. I left a fire ready to light up there. I'll get into something dry and call you."

The man bent his head in grave acceptance of her plan, and watched her as she ran upstairs. At the landing she turned to laugh down at him—a laugh seldom heard in Pengarry.

"It isn't going to be any use," she told him. "I've decided just what I shall do."

Christine flung back the door of her own room and surveyed its bare disorder with shrinking eyes. The least hateful to her of all the rooms in the bleak old house, it still was hated with all the intensity of a beauty-loving heart.

She kindled the fire and coaxed it into a blaze. A dingy traveling dress thrown across a half packed suit case revealed that the girl really had made up her mind. She tossed off her wet skirts and spread them before the fire. By the time the sticks were crackling she was dressed in the worn suit and ready to receive Strome.

He came up the stairs in response to her call. An unaccustomed twinkle far back in his deep-set gray eyes puzzled the girl. She vaguely remembered that she never had understood Philip Strome, although she had never tried very hard. To her he had simply been her aunt's lawyer, and had come and gone through the years steadily but unobtrusively. That he should be in her life at its turning point meant nothing to her but an added Pengarry irritation, which would soon be swept aside with the rest.

Christine motioned him toward the one empty chair and resumed the packing of her suit case.

"I am going to take the six o'clock train to Barbridge," she announced.

"Then that gives us a good half hour to talk," he replied. "When you get through packing, come over here and sit down."

He kicked the brown carpet hassock forward to a place near his chair. The girl continued her feverish preparations, and Strome waited in silence.

"I haven't much to pack. I guess I'm about through," she decided.

Strome pointed toward the hassock, and she sat down, with eyes averted and shoulders stubbornly set.

"Barbridge has become a pretty big city now," he commenced.

"Not so big as I wish it were, but it's as far as I can get on a hundred dollars."

"And the house," he added.

"And the house," she repeated, with a shudder.

"When Pengarry girls go to Barbridge—"

"I'm not a Pengarry girl!" Christine cut in sharply. "I never have been. They haven't made me feel as if I ever could be. They've dressed me in browns and drabs, they've tied me to a milestone and cut the rope to fit Pengarry boundaries. Do you realize," she flared hotly, "that I've never been out of the pasture in my life? All the girls in Pengarry are nice—all but Estelle Porter, and she went to Barbridge. I'm not nice. I don't want to be!"

The man's quiet gray eyes turned to her steadily.

"You're going to learn new meanings for words in Barbridge. We'll not talk about that now. I want to help you settle things here."

"What is there to settle? Aunt Net tied a string to the house, and I can't sell that."

"But you can rent it, and you can sell the books. They are valuable. Shall I try to find a tenant for you and to dispose of some of the things?"

"You can if you want to. I don't care particularly. I probably shall not need money."

"Your plans are definite, then?"

"Almost."

"Will you tell me?"

"I have a letter from Robert Graham. He's a Pengarry man who made money in Barbridge. He's interested in Pengarry girls. Estelle Porter told me about him. He's done a great deal for her."

"Just what do you expect him to do for you?"

"It doesn't matter, so long as it's something different."

"I know Robert Graham," he said quietly.

"Are you shocked because I'm going?"

"Not at all. You have to go."

She twisted to him in surprise.

"Have to! Why?"

"Because you want to."

Strome's protest would not have swayed her, but his acceptance left her oddly disappointed. To her he was just a man who had always found a strange pleasure in mixing quietly with their stupid affairs. Yet he was perhaps the least objectionable person she knew in Pengarry.

"The other people will be shocked—almost every one," she said, with a touch of triumph in her tone.

"Yes, they will be shocked—or grieved, perhaps we had better call it. They have wanted to be kind to you, Christine."

"If there's anything I hate more than nice people, it's kind people. I don't need any one to be kind to me. I've had that all my life. Aunt Net was the kindest person in the world. I had to stay here as long as she lived. I loved her, but I can't make myself sorry it's over."

"No, I shouldn't expect you to be sorry yet; but if your Aunt Net were here, there are many things she would tell you before you went alone to Barbridge."

"I'm glad I haven't got to listen to those things. I know them all, anyway. Most girls do."

"I'm glad, too," he surprised her; "because I'm afraid your Aunt Net would get it nearly all wrong. I'm going to tell you what I know about it, Christine, and you'd better listen. You mustn't go to Barbridge feeling afraid of men."

"I'm not."

"I mean that most men will treat a girl square—don't forget that; but you'll have to play on the level."

"What do you mean by 'on the level'?"

"Don't light a fire in your bedroom and ask Barbridge men to join you."

The girl's face flamed, and she jumped to her feet.

"Do you suppose I didn't know that? This doesn't count."

Impetuously she swung into a raincoat and jammed a shapeless turban on her rough brown hair.

"I'm ready," she announced. "I'm going to eat in the train."

Strome rose stiffly and picked up the suit case.

"I believe I will walk over to the station with you."

Christine went downstairs and into the yard without a backward look. Strome remained to deaden the fire and to lock the door.

"I'll keep the key," he said, as he joined her. "I shall probably find a tenant before long."

"It doesn't matter."

She walked briskly toward the station with head held high. It was still snowing, and the wet flakes melted quickly on her hot cheeks. Strome looked intently into her averted face as he kept pace. It did not seem all melted snow that trickled down from her lashes.

Early evening lights streamed out from Pengarry kitchens.

"Some of the good neighbors will be

carrying over your supper before long," remarked Strome.

"That's why I am going to eat on the train," snapped the girl. "I knew they would!" Then she turned to him fiercely. "Why don't you say what you're thinking? Why do you pretend? Why don't you tell me I'm an ungrateful little wretch?"

"You're an ungrateful little wretch."

He smiled, but she saw only the same wistful sympathy in his grave eyes, and it maddened her.

They strode on in silence. When they reached the station, Strome took the black bag from her arm once more and bought a ticket to Barbridge. By the time he returned, the train was in.

"Is Graham going to meet you?" he asked.

"No, he doesn't know I am coming. He just told me to run down any time."

"Where will you stop?"

"At the Majestic—the hotel where Estelle Porter went."

Strome scribbled an address on his card and tucked it into the bag he still held.

"If you don't happen to like that place," he suggested, "try this one. It's where I usually go. I'll be down before long. That hundred dollars isn't going far, and you'll need the rent money. Probably I can sell the books, too."

He helped her aboard the train and handed back the little bag. She looked down into his upraised face.

"You have been very—kind," she said.

"And I remember how you hate kind people," he smiled back. "But if you should happen to need one, just write or telephone, will you?"

As she turned to enter the train, her brown eyes twinkled, but she made no promise.

II

It would be ten o'clock when Christine reached Barbridge. Her young mind leaped joyously in anticipation of the unconventional arrival. For years she had lived vividly this first journey into the city that seemed so vast with possibilities.

She looked from the window as the train plunged on into the gathering darkness. It added zest to her great adventure to watch dim, shadowy objects glide by, with here and there a mysteriously blinking light.

She was going into the unknown with her heart a blank upon which the world must

write. She did not believe herself innocent. She saw, rather, a very sophisticated young person who was journeying for the first time toward her own country, where people would speak her language.

Ever since Estelle Porter had written home her vitally human letters, Christine had been hungrily impatient for the coming of her own great day. She despised Estelle as a girl, and hoped never to meet her in Barbridge; but she prized her letters as tangible links connecting Pengarry with the promised land.

She had not thoroughly understood Estelle's last letter. Evidently the girl had become ungratefully dissatisfied, for she wrote of leaving Barbridge. Christine was glad. She would be under no obligations to look her up.

To Christine, the Majestic had loomed as the most vivid among Estelle's word pictures. It was her goal. Already her heart was leaping in response to the glowing welcome which its laughter and music and lights would hold out to the girl starved for freedom. There would be no wistful, puzzled eyes here trying to solve the mystery of a soul which was all mystery, even to itself. They would understand, and without question they would draw her close.

She was not impatient now. She was enjoying intensely each forward pulse of the train. She felt that she could be patient for hours, now that she knew the moment was really speeding toward her, though last night it had seemed as if she could not wait a moment more.

When the lights of Barbridge actually came within sight, Christine caught her breath and closed her eyes. Then, slowly, as if treasuring each moment of their first meeting, she stepped from the train and walked with the crowd from the station.

No girl ever greeted a lover with a more rapturously beating heart than Christine brought to her city. She had wanted it so long, and now she had it! She could not govern the smiles that flashed across her lips and out through her happy eyes. Men turned to smile back, and the girl felt that each greeting was a tribute to which she must give response.

She had come home!

In her gladness Christine had forgotten that she was not becomingly dressed. She saw herself reflected in each well gowned woman who passed. She did not know that she looked shabby and strange and foreign.

With nearly one hundred dollars in her black bag, she did not hesitate to hire a taxi and proudly to name her hotel. In five minutes the girl with the oddly piquant face and the dingy Pengarry coat and turban was left with her one shabby suit case before the blazing entrance of the Majestic.

It was all she had expected, and more. The lights welcomed her just as she had dreamed. The marble and brass and plate glass sparkled and called to her. She stepped inside the great entrance, and with the smile that she could not control she went to the desk.

The clerk glanced from the girl's shabby bag to the dark, eager face under the shapeless turban.

"We have nothing vacant," he informed her crisply.

Christine looked around for a moment helplessly. Surely he had not understood! She stammered further explanation.

"We have no room vacant to-night," he repeated.

Christine's head went high. She made no further plea. The welcoming lights had turned to a thousand probing eyes brazenly aggressive. They should witness no outward sign of her defeat. She gave back challenge for challenge and returned to the street.

She stood uncertainly at the edge of the curb, but gave no backward look at the blazing tower of inhospitality. She studied the words Philip Strome had written on his card. They gave the only other address she knew in Barbridge. She curtly directed a driver thither, with the smiles and gladness gone from her tone.

She crept into the car and leaned back against the cushions to adjust herself to the first Barbridge jolt. She hated the thought of dependence upon any Pengarry advice. It seemed like a tug of the familiar rope, an obstructing bar in the old confining pasture. When the car turned into a quiet side street, and stopped before a dingy, low-posted house, Christine almost cried out her rebellion.

A woman stood in the doorway, as if to welcome an expected guest. Her kind face was wistfully eager.

"You are Miss Bond?" she greeted. "I have been watching for you. Mr. Strome telephoned. I have a fire in your room already."

Defiant blood streamed into the girl's cheeks.

"You are very kind," she muttered, and in her heart the words rang malice.

She followed the woman inside the brown-papered hall, and shivered as she glimpsed the flames from crackling wood. Everything was to have been so brilliantly different. With the closing of the shabby brown door, Christine's beautiful dream was shut out, and she was sent back to the dull sameness of her frostbitten pasture. She strained at the leash, and came up against the solid kindness of the good woman's questioning welcome.

"You'll want some hot supper?"

"I ate on the train. I want only a bath and bed."

"Of course, deary, of course! You'll find everything ready." The woman led the way to a small upper room, and bustled in ahead of the shrinking girl. "And shall I call you in the morning?"

"No—I am going to have breakfast down town. I don't want you to bother at all. And you mustn't mind if I go right to bed, I'm so tired."

The woman lingered.

"Do you know, deary, I come from Pengarry too. I'm Sarah Barton. Perhaps you've heard of my folks. Oh, it'll do me a lot of good to have you here! I was hoping you'd tell me about everything, I get that homesick."

Christine's heart groaned.

"To-morrow," she promised.

The look of questioning in the woman's eyes remained with Christine long after the door had closed. It was like seeing a ghost. If she had disliked Philip Strome for his harmless meddling, she hated him now for the Pengarry welcome held out to her by the hands of Barbridge. So he had guessed that the Majestic would not take her, that she would have to turn helplessly to his unwelcome guidance!

She threw off the hateful clothes and plunged into a hot bath, then ran the water cold until her body glowed red. The sheets were warm and fragrant, and, after all, this was only to-night. There still was to-morrow, with all the golden to-morrows to follow.

III

CHRISTINE slept soundly, and jumped from bed early next morning in all the tingle of a rekindled zest. Robert Graham would solve her problem. He would show her to-day just how to start her new life.

She had commenced it all wrong, but he would soon help her to bury these ghosts of Pengarry, just as he had helped Estelle Porter. Probably it was he who had opened for Estelle the brass and plate glass portal of the unfriendly Majestic.

Mrs. Barton flurried in anxiety when Christine insisted on eating down town.

"But you'll be back for dinner, deary?"

"I'm not sure. I'll leave my suit case here and come for it some time before night."

"Come for it! You aren't going to stay with me, then?"

"I don't know." Christine smiled back into the woman's disappointed face. "Anyhow," she relented, "I'll tell you all the news from Pengarry before I go."

The woman watched her from the doorway, and Christine felt as if a thousand familiar and wistful eyes were upon her back as she turned toward the busy streets of Barbridge.

Robert Graham owned the big department store at the corner of Lenox and Madden Streets. The place would be easy to find, because cars marked "Lenox Street" were constantly passing. She preferred to walk, so that the life of the city might beat into her blood. She was loving it again. She had forgiven its rebuff of the night before. She hadn't been properly introduced. After all, one wouldn't want a new friend to be too free. It was her mistake. Humbly she asked pardon.

She passed the haughty Majestic on her way to Lenox Street. It seemed less important now, and there was a certain lazy insolence about its sleeping inactivity. Through the plate glass windows she looked in at the almost empty office. To-night she would perhaps come back. Triumph unmixed with malice was in the thought.

Christine did not feel like eating breakfast yet. She was very eager to see Robert Graham.

When she came to his name extended over the long line of display windows, her heart leaped. For the first time her goal had become tangible. Very close to her now was this man with the fairy wand. His letter had suggested much while it promised nothing. Its very uncertainty added charm. She did not want to know yet what Graham had waiting for her. Just so long as it was different, nothing else mattered.

She entered the store slowly, with the care of repressed anticipation rather than

with the reluctance of timidity. It was the first time she ever had been inside a big store. Unnoticed, she wandered from aisle to aisle, trying to decide just how to make her presence known. This domain seemed an empire in itself, and she hesitated to ask boldly for its king. Doubtless his office would be apart somewhere. She would explore carefully until she found it, and would go directly to him.

There were few shoppers at this early morning hour, but the store seemed full of faces. Christine pitied these uniformed girls who stood behind long counters. They seemed all the same in their regulation black dresses and low white collars. There was not even a bright bow here and there to relieve the monotony. In vivid contrast, the goods they sold were displayed in riots of splendid color.

As Christine passed from room to room, she knew that whatever Graham had for her to do would not be this. Never could she join that vast army, never do each hour of every day the identical thing that hundreds of girls were doing over and over in the same listless way.

Yet what if that had been all he meant? She must know. She must stop this aimless wandering and find him. Christine was growing excited and afraid.

She approached a blue-coated boy waiting near his elevator.

"I want to find Mr. Graham's office," she said.

He grinned, motioned her inside the cage, and carried her to the top floor.

"You won't see him unless you got a date," he warned her.

And it was so. She found Graham entrenched behind an impregnable barrier. The guardian of his sanctum recognized no rights of Pengarry, and Christine was turned away in defeat.

She walked heavily past glass-partitioned offices, feeling an alien in this world of quiet activity. Clerks on high stools glanced casually out at her, and then bent to their endless tasks. When she reached the street once more, she felt alone and helpless. She looked aimlessly into store windows. She wanted to replace her hated Pengarry clothes with some of the finery displayed, and it was not wholly prudence that checked her. With deliberate calculation she felt that the fairy godfather would wave a brighter wand over a *Cinderella* who seemed to need it much.

Christine was not hungry, but she knew that she must eat. She would not go back yet to that hated side street and talk to Sarah Barton about Pengarry. There must be a way in which she could reach the man who really wanted to see her.

She entered the first lunch room that appeared, and lingered over coffee and rolls as long as possible. Finally she paid her small check and turned to leave the place. A telephone booth in the corner brought a quick decision. She found Graham's number, and gave it with revived confidence, but the result left her helplessly shut out from him. She was told that Mr. Graham could not be disturbed.

As she turned again to the street, Christine felt farther from Robert Graham than she had been in Pengarry. She must write to him, and she would have to wait the long hours necessary for his reply to reach her. Her great adventure seemed very far away now.

She walked listlessly back toward Mrs. Barton's house. The woman had seen her as she turned the corner, and was waiting eagerly at the door, just as she had been the night before. Christine looked up with the same inscrutable smile with which she always had faced Pengarry. In her heart she wished she could feel grateful for a stranger's mothering when she knew she sorely needed it; but she was not grateful. She wished that she might have entered unobserved, could have gone to her room alone, and kicked out her disappointment on the bed.

"There's a letter been waiting for you, deary. It came by special messenger just after you went."

Christine took the envelope in trembling hands, and tore it open. Her eyes darted over the brief lines. Then she laughed in quick relief. This is what she read:

DEAR MISS BOND:

Won't you run down to my office in the Bradley Block about half past eleven this morning? I just had a good letter from our friend Strome. He suggests that I should look after you.

ROBERT GRAHAM.

Christine turned quickly to Mrs. Barton.

"How did Mr. Strome know I had come here?"

"His message said to telegraph him as soon as you arrived."

"And you did?"

"Yes, deary, the minute you were safe tucked in bed last night. Is your note from

him?" Mrs. Barton asked with honest and kindly interest.

"No," replied Christine shortly. Then she was ashamed. "It's just a business letter," she added. "You won't mind if I hurry right back? I have an appointment at half past eleven."

IV

A NEW Christine sped back along the now familiar street. Again she had been all wrong. No one was to blame but herself. She should have been more tactful. She should have written and asked Graham to arrange an appointment. She might have known he would have other offices outside the store, for Estelle had said that he was a millionaire with varied interests.

Mixed with her elation was a fierce resentment against Philip Strome. She could have found a way for herself. He needn't make it seem as if this appointment were gained by his influence and interference.

How many different faces the city had! Just a moment before it had been sullenly scowling; now it gave back gayly smile for smile.

Christine inquired the way to the Bradley Block, and almost ran in her eagerness to reach the new goal. She found Graham's office on the third floor, and bravely entered the outer room. She was taken without question into the sanctum, and was left alone with a big man who turned in his swivel chair to look at her.

He seemed the most remarkable man Christine ever had seen. She wished she might stand apart to study him and become accustomed to him before she must speak. He did not look at her fully, but kept his eyes on the letter he held in his hand.

"So it's another girl from Pengarry!" he greeted impersonally. "Suppose you sit down there and wait a moment, until I can sign these letters."

Christine breathed her relief, and chose a chair back from his desk, where she could watch him. She studied the quick, sure movement of his big hands, and marveled at the thick white hair that failed to take the edge of keen youth from his face. As he read through his mail with rapid thoroughness, he raised his eyes now and then to study maps and charts which hung around his desk.

Christine noticed the extreme darkness of his eyes. They seemed almost black beneath his white hair—not the glittering

black that she would have feared, but a deep, mellow black, like rich velvet.

He turned unexpectedly and smiled directly into Christine's face. She rose and came to his desk. He pushed aside the papers in front of him and leaned forward to look at her more closely.

"So you are a girl from Pengarry!" he repeated.

He placed a chair near his own, and Christine sat down stiffly. She wanted to flare out that she was not a Pengarry girl, just as she had flared to Philip Strome, but something in the face above her curbed the impulse.

"Let's see," he went on. "You wrote to me about going into the store, didn't you?"

"No, no!" Christine protested quickly. "I did not mean that."

His heavy lids lifted.

"What's the matter with the store?"

"It would be worse than Pengarry. I couldn't do that!"

"Was Pengarry so bad?"

"It was hideous. Surely you must know how hideous it was!"

"I knew once. Would you like to go in the office, then? What can you do?"

The stretch of glass windows and the girls behind orderly rows of desks flashed before her mind.

"Please, not the office," she said.

Graham leaned back in his chair, and his eyes narrowed to searching black darts.

"It isn't work you want, then?"

Christine rose and stood restlessly before him. It seemed to her that she could not sit quiet beneath the searching of his gaze. It was not like the Pengarry searching. It was more keen and ruthless, and less kind. His words struck into her heart coldly.

"I thought perhaps you would understand," she said.

He had drawn a letter from his pocket, and sat looking at it, as she stood near his chair.

"Sit down," he directed. "What is it that I am to understand?"

"All my life," she burst out, "I've had to do the same things at the same time in the same way. You can't know how I hate it! I couldn't stand behind a counter in a black dress. I couldn't sit at a desk and add columns of figures. That would just tie me to a rope again!"

The line of Graham's lips grew thinner. He was not looking at her, but down upon

the closely written sheets that he still held in his hand.

"I have a letter here from Strome," he said quietly. "He's a mighty good fellow. I like him. He's expecting me to look after you."

"There is no reason why he should expect anything concerning me at all!" flared the girl.

"But evidently he does, and I think a lot of Strome." Graham lifted his eyes from the letter and looked at her. "There have been a number of girls from Pengarry come down here to work," he said. "I wish they wouldn't. It makes a difference to me when a girl is from home like that. She gets on my mind. Have you any idea what you could do? We need models. Would you like that?"

"Wasn't that what Estelle Porter did? It means trying on clothes that other people will wear. She didn't do that long, did she?"

"No, not very long." There was an edge to Graham's tone. "Would you like to try it?"

"I should hate that more than anything else. I love beautiful things, and I should want for my own every dress I tried on."

Graham's eyes grew tired. He folded and unfolded the letter in his hand.

"Strome's coming in to-day," he said. "Suppose you let me talk it over with him. Perhaps he can suggest something."

"What can he have to do with it?"

Christine was fighting down the thickness in her throat and the hot tears that sprang to her eyes. The fairy godfather's wand was of plain, unlovely wood, and it was jabbing her with ugly splinters. She had believed that it would be a golden staff of opportunity.

"I do not know yet," said Graham. "You, a girl with a Pengarry mind and a Pengarry training, love beautiful things and do not want to work. It is a problem."

"I don't think you will find that I have a Pengarry mind," she flashed; "and I have not let myself have a Pengarry training. I do want to work, and I believe I can, but there must be beauty in it, and it must be something that no one else could do as well."

He shook his head.

"The thing that no one else could do as well wouldn't be anything I could teach you. It would be something you already had."

"But I have it!" cried Christine. "I've always had it. It's in me. I am simply asking you for a chance to use it."

"And each little girl from Pengarry is a different girl, isn't she?" he pondered. "You are different from the rest, but they were just as different in their own little ways, and the problem is the same. You see that, don't you? Let me think about it, and I'll send for you a little later."

He rose and stood beside her chair. Christine did not understand the tired drooping of his lids or the heaviness in his voice. She could not know why the problem she gave him seemed to age the face that had first appeared so young beneath his white hair.

He stood near the open door and watched her as she passed into the hall.

"Run back to Mrs. Barton's, and I shall send for you as soon as I have talked with Strome. And remember," he added in a gentler tone, "it is because you are from Pengarry."

What did he mean? That, above all else, was the thing that Christine most longed to forget.

He held out his hand, and uncertainly she put her gloved fingers within his big palm. In confusion, without knowing why, she turned away and walked slowly into the street.

Her young spirit was quivering with its sense of defeat. All her eagerness had died out. It was only because she was a girl from Pengarry that Graham would help her, and then not until he had talked with Philip Strome. She felt a feverish and resentful impulse to find her big opportunities without these men, not to go back when Graham should send for her, but to show them, to show all of Pengarry, just what she could do without their help.

The thing which she told Graham she possessed was crying out within her for expression. She had a sense of pulling at the same old leash which had held her back ever since she could remember. In Pengarry she had been encompassed by fenced pastures. Here she seemed bounded by high walls and by the hurrying faces that passed to and fro, entirely unconscious of this wanderer who had come home to them. These, then, were not her people, after all. They were not talking her language, they were not even speaking to her in their own.

From time to time Christine caught glimpses of herself in shop mirrors as she

passed. The reflection of her ugly, ill fitting clothes became more than she could endure. Her hope of the fairy godfather's wand had dimmed. A fierce new pride had taken possession of her spirit, now that even the most desirable miracle the wand could perform must be accomplished for her in the name of Pengarry.

She resolutely turned to study the girls that passed. She chose for her models the figures that looked most daringly secure.

Her heart was pounding when she entered the big store for her first shopping adventure. Christine's aunt always had made the girl's clothes, usually cutting over worn garments. She wished now that she had not gone to Graham as she was.

When Christine was told that the blue tailored suit, with its smart jacket, would cost sixty dollars, she caught her breath. That was more than half of all she had; but after a brief struggle with prudence she bought it. By late afternoon she had discarded, one by one, the evidences of Pengarry. Her old things she left to be delivered to Mrs. Barton's, hoping that she need never see them again.

When she glimpsed the piquantly new self that looked out at her from store mirrors, her brown eyes sparkled with an almost passionate admiration. As she sped along the street toward Mrs. Barton's house, she forgot that she had eaten no luncheon. In her self-conscious isolation it seemed to her that every passer-by must notice the vivid metamorphosis. She did not realize that she had now become merely one of the hurrying, well dressed throng.

V

MRS. BARTON greeted Christine just inside the hall with repressed excitement. Her eyes were shining, and she was in flurry of expectation.

"He has come!" she confided. "He has told me all about Pengarry!"

Christine's face clouded.

"Who has come?" she asked, knowing instinctively what the answer would be.

"Mr. Strome."

The girl flung out a hostile inquiry.

"Is he here now?"

"Yes—he's waiting by the fire. He wants to see you."

"I am going to my room. I am too tired to talk."

"But I have your supper ready!"

Then Christine remembered that she had

eaten nothing since her scanty breakfast. She realized that she was faint and famished. She tossed off the new hat and coat, and turned to smooth her hair before the mirror.

"How nice you look!" whispered Sarah Barton. "Though you were sweet enough before," she added.

Christine's smile warmed for a moment, although to look nice or sweet was not her heart's desire just then. She followed Mrs. Barton into the dingy front room, and stood near the door, as Philip Strome rose with extended hand.

"I have just come from Graham's place," he told her.

She nodded coldly, too resentful of his interference to speak.

"A client of mine has rented your house," he added. "I have sold some of the books and pictures, too."

"It is too bad for you to have me on your mind like this," she said crisply. "Why need you?"

"There are some things we can't help, Christine." He rose and opened the door leading into the dining room. "But let's eat. Mrs. Barton is waiting."

The girl stood by his side, a slender, defiant figure, hungry in spite of her rebellious spirit.

"Pengarry food warmed over in Barbridge!" she almost choked. "Don't you know how I must hate it?"

"Hush!" he said sternly. "Do you want to hurt her?"

"Hurt!" she cried out. "It doesn't seem as if I could hurt any one enough to-night. Why did you have to do it? Why did you go to Mr. Graham? Didn't I tell you I wanted to live my own life?"

"Could you just yet, Christine?"

"Of course I could. Why not?"

"Everything depends so much on how you start."

"That's just what I've been feeling, and you are making me start all wrong. You'll get me to hating this, too!"

Strome, smiling, stood near the open door.

"Please come," he urged gently.

Mrs. Barton, warm and excited, hurried from the kitchen.

"I've cooked everything I know you'll like," she beamed. "I've got all the things we used to make back home."

Strome grinned. Christine turned to him with her brown eyes snapping.

"Isn't this cozy?" she derided. "You are enjoying it, aren't you?"

After that she ate in silence, trying not to listen to the Pengarry gossip with which Sarah Barton urged Strome to appease her yearning. She was relieved when finally she could push back her chair and move from the room.

"I am tired," she said. "You will excuse me, I know, if I go right upstairs."

"I want to talk with you," Strome insisted gravely. "I shall not keep you long."

He led her into the front room and placed her chair near the fire. She disregarded the proffered seat and stood stiffly by the door.

"I have a little money for you, too," Strome told her. "I was able to rent the house for forty dollars a month, and the pictures brought fifty dollars more. You may need the money, Christine, so I brought it down to you."

"I wish I could feel more grateful," she said; "for I do need it."

His eyes lingered in appreciation on her slender figure.

"You've been shopping," he commented.

She resented his remark, as she resented everything he did. She realized that there was nothing he could do to please her. She felt vaguely sorry for this, and turned to him more gently.

"Please," she entreated, "won't you just let me alone?"

"I can't, Christine." He left his place near the fire and came to her. "Do you want to hear what Graham has decided?"

"No!" she cried out sharply. "Not now. He will tell me."

"He wants you to run in to-morrow afternoon."

"I am glad!" She drew a quick breath. "May I go upstairs now?"

"I suppose there isn't much that I can do now," he said, as he stood aside to let her pass; "but I shall bring down the rent money every month, and I think I can sell the rest of the things. If you really do need me, Christine, you'll send for me, won't you?"

"I'll send for you when I need you," she retorted, and the words took on a spiteful meaning as she spoke.

He followed her into the hall.

"Good night," he said, and held out his hand. "I shall probably be gone before you are awake."

Christine gathered her hat and coat from

the table, and, with her arms thus filled, did not meet his friendly hand. As she turned back to say good night, he winced from the look in her eyes.

"Poor kid!" he said softly.

Her face flamed and her lips parted to hurl out the anger his pity brought. She was panting when she reached the top of the stairs, and she almost ran until she entered her room. She closed the door behind her and flung herself upon the unyielding bed.

Quick remembrance of her immaculate new clothes caused her to spring up. She carefully smoothed and brushed out the wrinkles. Then she sat down to think.

Why did every one look at her with such sad, heavy eyes? What about her was so tragic? She tried to study her face in Sarah Barton's old-fashioned mirror. She saw only her vivid, eager girlhood, her hunger, and her disappointment. This was the second day of the glorious new life, and disillusionment after disillusionment had piled up against her.

She blamed Strome for Robert Graham's withdrawal of his former spontaneous friendliness. His first reply to her letter had not sounded like his present grave acceptance of responsibility. Strome had somehow succeeded in dimming the full splendor of the golden wand. It was as if Graham now was planning to do for her only what Strome might wish done. That was unfair.

She began to envy Estelle Porter. At least no one had followed Estelle down to Barbridge from Pengarry. She had been free to live her life while Pengarry shook its head.

Christine felt that she had simply been honest, yet her frankness had seemed to trouble Robert Graham. She knew that this fiercely fighting power within her would stifle in his store or in his office, and she had told him so; yet she had come with a longing to serve. She did want to work; but not in that pale, listless way, not as just a cog in his big machine.

She did not feel that she needed any special training for the work she longed to do. If only she could lay hands upon it, she felt she could show them all what she meant. The power stirred as if it were beating wings in her slender body, and to-night it hurt her terribly. It was the actual pain of it that brought the sharp words to her lips and the rebellion to her heart.

As her thoughts dwelt upon Robert Graham, she knew, without realizing why, that he could unleash for her this mysterious force. She felt now that no one else could do so, forgetting that he represented her first contact with the world's big men. Feverishly she wondered what his decision was, and what he and Strome had talked of that afternoon. She wished now that she had let Strome tell her.

VI

NEXT day, on her way to Graham's office, Christine was more sure of herself. The element of which she now felt uncertain was Graham's ability to comprehend. She had not found in him the understanding mind toward which she had been plunging. Here, too, was the cool, steady hand which seemed to bar her against—what was this formidable thing from which, all her life, people had tried to guard her?

All that she asked was to be herself. Was it from herself they aimed to keep her? She felt the old antagonistic spirit of rebellion creeping over her, so that by the time she reached Graham's office her eyes were brooding.

He let her wait nearly fifteen minutes in his outer office, and when he finally sent for her she found him absorbed in the papers spread over his desk. He looked up with a start, as if bringing himself back to a surprised realization of Christine's presence. She resented the indifference that could shift her affairs to such an obviously unimportant side issue.

He was watching the impatient tap of her shoe against the floor. He saw the brooding resentment in her eyes and the stiffening of her lips. He plunged at once into the problem.

"Strome seems to think it matters tremendously just how we figure this deal out for you," he said. "I have been thinking about it, and perhaps he is right. We are older, Strome and I, and we see pretty straight. I think it may be worth while to show you."

"Do you mean," she said coolly, "that it matters to Mr. Strome?"

"To all of us. You realize, don't you, that I wouldn't have time or inclination to do things without motives?"

"Of course, you aren't expecting me to understand you," she said.

"No, not yet; but I think you will. First, you'll have to realize that busy men,

men who do the world's work, do not always have time for girls from Pengarry. Ordinarily we should turn you over to the store or office managers, and let you sink or swim—either that, or we might strew a bed of roses and let you stay happy so long as you had power to keep the roses fresh. You believe you have definite ideas of what you want?" he ended.

"Yes, but not of how to get it."

"I am going to let you sit here at a desk in this office to-day. It is here I do my thinking. No woman has ever worked in this room with me."

"You mean it is possible that I might?"

"No, but I am going to take time to show you just why you could not."

Christine moved toward the desk he had indicated, separated from his own by the width of the room. She drew off her gloves, carefully removed her coat, and settled herself in the chair.

For a long time she sat thus apart in silence, taking the pulse of the office, as it were. Now and then she glanced at Graham, and could sense a certain irritated restlessness in all his movements. After a while he summoned his secretary with an impatient jab of the bell, and dictated feverishly. Christine studied the efficient, middle-aged woman, whose pencil glided swiftly under a skilled hand. She was colorlessly plain, and seemed part of a smooth running machine. She had glanced sharply at Christine as she entered, but after that first close scrutiny had given no other sign that she felt the stranger's presence. When Graham had finished, she gathered her notes quietly and without a word slipped from the office.

He turned to Christine.

"Miss Cates is a model secretary," he said. "She accomplishes your own ambition of doing things for me better than any one else ever has."

"Oh, I don't mean that—not that sort of thing at all," cut in Christine sharply.

"It is fortunate," he said with dry humor, "for I should not part with Miss Cates. She has the rare faculty of making me forget she is alive. You"—he turned to her with a glow in his eyes that was almost anger—"you are the most aggressively alive person I ever have allowed to disrupt a whole afternoon."

He pushed back his chair and stretched his arms in an effort to relax, then moved toward the window. The office was gradu-

ally growing dark. In the dim light Graham stood straight, still looking out upon the street below.

"Come here!" he said abruptly.

Christine rose at once and moved to his side. They looked out over the city. One by one the lights were springing into life. Crowds were surging homeward. Voices rose as if in delayed welcome to Christine. The lights blinked knowingly into her face and seemed to meet her eyes with a fresh understanding.

Something in the darkening quiet of the room and the unexpected intimacy of Graham's request caused Christine's cheeks to blaze in a quick excitement.

"What is it, Mr. Graham?" she asked breathlessly.

"I suppose you realize," he accused, "that I haven't been able to do a single thing worth while all afternoon?"

"And is it my fault?"

"It is your fault."

She experienced a thrill of elation. She would not have wished to remain unfelt. She wanted him to be aware of her. She had no ambition to fit, as did Miss Cates, into the big general plan.

"You can see, can't you," he went on brutally, "that you aren't the sort of person I could have around the office? There are some women we can work with and some we can't; but I suppose what you couldn't possibly understand is the hunger, the almost boyish greed, which we men here in the grind must feel for the unspoiled freshness of you little girls from the Pengarrys of the world. It isn't so much that we really want to spoil you as that we so vitally need you."

He turned abruptly from her and paced the floor. She stood silent, still looking out upon the blinking lights.

"We long to be boys again," he continued, "and you're the only power left that could make us young. Right this minute, as you stand there, I need almost desperately the youth you could bring me; but I am not going to take it."

"Why not?" she asked, in a muffled voice.

"Because you are from Pengarry, and because of Philip Strome. I am not going to take it, though I am very tired, and your youth is the only thing in the world that could rest me."

Christine came closer to him with an impulsive cry:

"I want to rest you! I want to make you young!"

"Yes!" he said harshly. "That's what makes it so damned hard; but I am going to send you back now to Mrs. Barton and to Strome."

Christine's heart was pounding painfully.

"But I do not want to go back to Mrs. Barton," she protested, "and I hate Strome. I want to learn the ways of your city. I want to live, to be myself. Ever since I first saw you, I have known that unless you teach me I shall never know."

He smiled at that.

"Then you are even younger than I thought. It seems ridiculous, even to myself, how much I want to take you out and teach you the life you think you want to know."

"It wouldn't hurt *you*, would it?"

He turned to her sharply.

"I don't know. It isn't like youth to think of that. What made you?"

"I am not so young as you think, nor am I so sure that you would be able to teach me anything that it would hurt me to know."

He looked at her, puzzled.

"You are not like—"

"I am not like Estelle Porter, if that is what you mean."

"No, you are different; but they are all different. I told you that before. You simply are different in your own little way. Life is the same. We can't get away from that."

"Why do we want to get away from it?"

He let her stand near him in the quiet dark; then he moved restlessly as he looked down into the night.

"It is strange," he mused, "how this hour, just as the lights creep on, is always the call to youth. It grips me very often. The trouble is that down underneath I've always been a dreamer, and I robbed the boy of his dreams. Lots of us here in life's market place are like that; and when youth comes back, we cannot hold it close without hurting it. Age doesn't mean to be cruel, but it has to, if it calls to youth."

"You are not old," she objected. "You have more power to make me alive than any man I ever knew."

"Than any man you ever knew!" He laughed. "And have you known so many, poor little Christine? Come!" He strode away abruptly. "I'll take you somewhere, after all. Get your coat."

He switched on the light, and she saw that his face was working strangely.

VII

CHRISTINE found that she was trembling. Graham held her coat and watched her as she pinned on her hat. Together, they walked through the outer office and into the street below. His car was waiting at the entrance, and in silence he helped her to the step. In a low tone he directed the chauffeur, and then took his place by Christine's side.

She was still trembling, but her heart was exultant in a fiercely joyous excitement. As they sped forward, his voice came to her cool and repressed.

"First I am going to do a rather cruel thing, Christine—cruel to you; and then I am going to do something very hard—hard to me. Neither is what I want to do. I'd like to watch your eyes sparkle with the wines of life. I'd like to buy senseless, pretty things to dazzle you, to make you laugh, to fill the cup until it ran over."

The car stopped, and he jerked open the door.

"Instead of that," he ended, "this is what I will show you." He pointed upward to a light gleaming fitfully in a window of a cheap apartment house. "I want you to run up there for a few minutes, to see an old friend of yours. I'll wait down here."

Christine's tense elation fell from her. She looked at him miserably.

"It is Estelle Porter," she accused in resentment. "You want me to go there?"

"For just a few moments. Estelle wanted life, too, you remember. One of our foreign buyers offered it to her. She left the store, and for a time I lost track of her. When she returned, a few months ago, I gave her the old job back, because she, too, was from Pengarry; but it was no use. I want you to talk with her. One look at her will tell you things I can't. Go, Christine—I'll wait."

There was a finality of command in his tone, and Christine knew that she must obey. Everything in her rebelled against this enforced visit to a girl whom she always had disliked and avoided. She went dully up the stairs and along the dark hall, until she came to the door under which the light filtered. She knocked, and waited in miserable expectancy.

The girl who opened the door and stood against the background of unclean disorder

was not a pretty sight. Christine recoiled. In less than two years Estelle Porter had changed almost beyond recognition.

Her first greeting of Christine was impetuously glad. She held out both hands and drew her inside the room.

"Christine Bond!" she cried. "You have really come!"

Then her gladness fell from her, and she stood sullenly watchful as Christine's eyes swept the room and rested cringing upon her haggard unloveliness. To an accustomed eye Estelle, as she looked now, might not have appeared especially tragic, nor could there have been intense pathos in the spoiled and painted face, the heavy-lidded eyes, and the unclean, careless fashion of her dress; but Christine was fresh from Pengarry, and in her memory she still held the vision of a vividly lovely Estelle, who two years ago had turned her face toward Barbridge.

Christine tried to be matter-of-fact.

"Mr. Graham drove me over," she said. "He knew I would want to see you."

Estelle laughed harshly.

"Yes, he would," she jerked out. Then she swung around and ran her eye over Christine's immaculate simplicity. "You haven't been here long, I reckon?"

"I came only a few days ago," said Christine gently.

The other girl's wretchedness was too raw to let her taunt strike home.

"Graham's a good sort," Estelle conceded bitterly. "You're lucky. I wasn't." Then she switched abruptly. "How's every one at home?"

Christine was silent. There was nothing in Estelle's plight that she did not seem to understand intuitively, but she could summon no emotion of sympathy. The most she could feel was the utter tragedy of it. She felt helpless either to comfort or to accuse. The only satisfying realization was that she herself was different, always must be different. Her strongest emotion was a blazing anger against Robert Graham that he had not understood the difference, that he could imagine she needed this lesson.

Christine put out her hand, pink and fresh and young, to rest it for a moment on the other girl's shoulder.

"I will see you again," she said. "I must not keep him waiting. I just ran in to let you know that I am here."

She was unconscious of real cruelty, but Estelle winced away from her touch. Chris-

tine turned into the hall and held out her hand. As if she had not seen, Estelle slowly closed the door.

"Good-by," she said, and turned the key.

Christine walked rapidly downstairs and out into the cool night air. She drew a deep breath, then swung at once into her place beside Graham. She faced him with a short, hard laugh.

"And you really thought that! Not you, nor life, nor anything, ever could teach me things like that. You understand—not ever!"

As the car moved forward he laughed, too, but even more strangely.

"No, perhaps not just like that, for you are different; but life is life, and you are different only in your own little way. Now for the thing that is even harder. You remember that to-night I have desired warmth and youth. The boy has clamored for his dreams. You've stirred his hunger, you've wakened the dreamer and the vagrant. I want to take you with me to play and to laugh and to live, not because you are you, nor because I am I, not even because you are different, but because you are so wisely young. Instead of that, see where I take you! The first was your lesson—this is mine."

He said no more until the car stopped again. The house before which they alighted brought Christine a quick sense of stability and security, with a subtle, definite impression of age. In its permanency of stone and brick, it seemed to be the most solid house she ever had seen.

Graham led the way up the broad stone steps and opened the outer door. A woman came forward along the wide hall to greet him. This woman's face was colorless and calm. Her eyes were as cool and serene as a long stretch of Pengarry pasture. She, too, seemed stable and secure, and in spite of a certain remaining youth she brought with her a peaceful and very absolute sense of age.

"Marcia," Graham was saying gravely, "this is Christine Bond, from Pengarry. Christine, this is my wife. We'll all stay to dinner."

Then he laughed and walked slowly from them upstairs. He also left behind him the sure, definite impression of age.

VIII

In the cold, clear air of the next morning Christine walked briskly to Graham's office.

The excitement of her thoughts had allowed no sleep, yet she seemed vividly alive to the full freshness of the day.

There had been no definite appointment, but Graham had an air of waiting for her when she was ushered into his room. He instantly gave her full attention. There was a new surety in her manner as she took the vacant chair near his desk and leaned forward on her elbows, so that she might look closely into his face.

"I have been thinking nearly all night," she began. "I know now just what I can do for you better than any one else."

He laughed uneasily and shifted his gaze.

"I've been thinking a bit, too," he confessed. "I came to the conclusion that I acted somewhat like a kid last night."

He ran a hand through his white hair, as if to accentuate his age.

"It did seem a trifle foolish," she agreed. "It wasn't as if you could really teach me a lesson that way. You showed me the smooth-running machine of your office, the dismal failure of Estelle Porter's life, and the serene security of your home; but you defeated all you had in mind, because, standing out clear and strong, you also revealed to me your great need of me. Every other thing you tried to teach made me know more surely what I can do. Your Miss Cates is an institution. She brings you a permanent efficiency. I couldn't touch that. The Estelle Porters might have filled your play days, but they would have turned life bitter. That wouldn't have been youth. I couldn't touch that, either. Your home brings you peace. You need it. That, too, is an institution, a permanency, and never could I touch that; but there is something else."

As Christine talked, Graham studied her with an incredulous expectancy. She was deeply excited. Her eyes glowed and her lips were trembling. She had rehearsed through the night all that she was saying to him now. Her mind and her emotions were flying ahead of her words.

"There is something else," she repeated. "Tell me, isn't there?"

"Where did you learn all this?" he asked.

"Didn't you tell me that the thing I could do for you better than any one else would be something no one could teach?"

He smiled and leaned back.

"All right!" he encouraged. "Go on."

"I know all I must do, and all I must

not do. You are tired, and I am tireless. You are feeling old, and I am unconquerably young. It isn't as if you had lived your youth and worn it out. You told me you had cheated the boy of his dreams. You have stored all your youth, and there is so much of it piled up in you that it hurts. So far you haven't been able to get it out without hurting even more. Imagine the boy revealing himself to Miss Cates! How he would upset the smooth-running wheels of her efficiency! The Estelle Porters would make him scamper back ashamed and sorry and very bitter. He is a good sportsman, and he wants to play fair. Also he didn't dare go home with you, because more than anything else the boy hates to be made fun of. So the thing I can do that no one else could do as well is to play with you."

"Good God, child!" he cried out. "You frighten me! How do you know these things?"

"You showed me all of them very clearly yesterday; but does it matter how I know? A girl at twenty has had time to dream and think and plan. I haven't lived at all, nor played, nor loved, but I've always known that some day I would. I have saved a good deal of youth for you."

"Yes," he added, "and mixed it up considerably with a queer, oldish wisdom. Your plan is that I should build a little playhouse for you, and dress you up as my lost vision of youth?"

"Don't you think that would be wonderful?" she said. "Of course, there might be ugly things about it. For instance, Mr. Strome. He wouldn't understand."

"You bet he wouldn't!" agreed Graham wryly. "You'd have some time making Strome see that kind of idyl!"

"There isn't any reason why he should see, or why we should tell him anything about it. Another ugly thing is that I shall need money, and both of us would hate that."

"You're mighty clever!" he chuckled. "I expect you're figuring that one of the things a man can't buy is youth."

"But perhaps," she suggested, "the practical skeptic might invest for the boy."

"It's a beautiful idea," he said, "but utterly impossible, I'm afraid. The incredible part is that I have been sitting here listening to you with my heart pounding like a twenty-year-old kid. I've wasted a whole morning!" He rose and jerked up

the cover of his desk. "I'll figure out something for you to do that's sensible, and then I'll send for you. Run along home, now, to Mrs. Barton, and tell Strome to come here."

The fire died from Christine's face. She rose and turned to the door.

"I shall not tell Mr. Strome to come here," she said tensely. "You do not realize what you are doing. Not in all your life again will any one come to you meaning just what I meant. No doubt you have misunderstood. What I offered you was something fine and wholly good; but please do not talk it over with Mr. Strome. He would understand even less."

"I guess I have hurt you."

"No, you have not hurt me, and you have not made me feel ashamed, because I know just what I meant; but you have disappointed me."

She crossed the room quickly, and, before he could speak, went out and closed the door.

As she walked listlessly in the direction of Mrs. Barton's, she knew that after all she did feel hurt and ashamed. All night she had been thinking of Graham and his cheated youth and her own suspended experiences. Had he not listened at all, the shock of his final rebuff might not have been so great.

When she turned into the street leading to Mrs. Barton's door, she saw Philip Strome walking toward her. His head was thrown back and his lips were smiling. She was struck instantly by a certain air of youth and vigor which sprang from him. Never before had she thought of him as young.

"I knew you'd be coming," he greeted her. "Graham just telephoned. Will you walk back with me as far as Broad Street? I have a plan which I believe you are going to like."

Christine was faintly stirred with interest. She turned and walked back by Strome's side.

"You are not happy with Mrs. Barton," he began. "If you wish, a client of mine can let you have a small furnished apartment. The rent will be practically the same as you receive from your place in Pengarry. If you'd like to have me look after the details, you could move over there at once."

Christine laughed.

"What you are saying now isn't as kind and sensible as most of your suggestions,

but it is more satisfying. Are you taking me there now?"

"Yes. It is one of those two-room affairs, with kitchenette and bath. I believe it is the sort of thing you'd like. I'll look after the rent by turning over the money from the Pengarry house; so you needn't bother at all."

They swung forward together, keeping easy pace.

"You have just come from Graham's?" Strome asked.

"Yes," she replied shortly, and gave no further word.

"Has he offered something you might like?"

"He is going to send for me."

"In the mean time," Strome suggested, "would you be willing to do some work for another client of mine? It's only copying, but he's inclined to pay rather well, and there would be plenty of it to do from time to time. He prefers to have a typewriter sent to your place and have you do the work at home. Would you like that?"

"Not particularly," said Christine. "I hate typewriting. I did a lot of it in Pengarry for old Mr. Hemstead."

"Yes, I know you did, but this will be different. It's poetry. It really might amuse you. The fellow hammers it out on his own machine very roughly. I imagine he's ashamed of writing it, so that's why he turns it over to me and stays under cover. It sells, though," Strome added.

"It seems to me you have a great many very useful clients," she derided. "How they do smooth the way for me!"

He looked down at her intently. She flashed her rebellion into his clear gray eyes.

"I know you hate having me do things for you, Christine." He was not smiling now. "Just let me get you started right; then I'll not bother you unless you really need me. Here's the place."

He stopped before one of the large, modern apartment houses that dominate every American city. It seemed rather splendid to Christine's unaccustomed eyes. Strome led her through the ornate hall and into the small elevator. The apartment to which he took her was really attractive. As her eyes wandered over the furnishings, Christine was reluctant to reveal to him just how pleased she was. She had made up her mind to despise all that he did for her, but this was truly splendid.

"I do like it," she said at last, with an unexpected generosity. She went with him from room to room. "It is little and human. I like the smug newness of everything. It seems to fit, somehow. It is the sort of place I would have picked out myself, if I had known how."

Strome's face lighted with his pleasure.

"I thought so. Then we'll close the bargain," he said. "I'll have your things brought over from Mrs. Barton's, and you can stay right here. You'd better run over to-morrow and say good-by to her, though—we mustn't hurt her. After you get your bearings, I'll have the typewriter and the verses sent up to you. My business brings me to Barbridge very often, and I can carry the fellow's stuff to you and take your copies back to him. Will that be all right?"

"So you are to be the godfather with the fairy wand, after all!" she said.

"You still rebel, of course; but really it is best. Now I must go to see Graham. He sent for me."

"Don't talk me over with him," she requested. "I am quite satisfied with the arrangements you have made. If you tell him anything at all, just say that he need not bother."

"All right—I'll tell him that, Christine. Good-by for a while. I shall not see you again before I leave Barbridge. Have I fixed everything?"

"You certainly have fixed everything," she admitted.

She took his hand listlessly, and stood motionless in the center of the room until he had gone from the building. Then she darted to the telephone and called Graham's number. A moment more, and she heard his voice.

"I have a wonderful new plan," she told him. "Will you come here to-night and let me tell you? Mr. Strome will give you the address and explain what he has done."

"I was just trying to reach you at Mrs. Barton's," Graham's low voice came back. "Yes, I will come. I have a plan, too."

IX

ALL day Christine played with her house as a child plays with a new toy. The sense of possession thrilled her. It was so unlike anything she ever had known in Pengarry. One by one, she sat in all the chairs. She combed her hair before the white-enamelled dressing table, bathed in the tiled bathroom, and finally stretched in lazy content-

ment upon the flowered and frilled covering of the bed.

In the afternoon she went shopping again. Her search was for the softest, freshest, most girlish dress she could find. She also stocked her toy kitchen with hitherto forbidden and expensive dainties.

In the early evening she prepared for Graham with feverish delight. She had bought for his pilgrimage into youth a little gown of pale rose, low-cut and daintily fashioned. She tied her hair loosely back with a single bow of satin ribbon. She had hesitated a long time over her final surrender to the white kid slippers and the pink silk stockings, for this final extravagance would leave very little of the ninety dollars Strome had brought; but now, as she caught the effect of them in the long mirror on the closet door, they completed her thrill of satisfaction.

These were the first silk stockings Christine ever had worn. She bent forward to caress her reflection. She loved herself tonight. She loved the snug nest that her own money was providing, and she loved the whole of Barbridge. From the front windows she could look out over the city. She stood there now, watching for the first glimpse of Graham's car.

She wondered what his plan could be. His low voice over the wire had held a new note. She knew he had been thinking of her ever since she had left him.

She waited nearly half an hour before Graham's car stopped at the street door and she saw him enter the house. She listened eagerly until she heard the click of the elevator door; then she ran out into the hall to greet him.

His face was grave as he walked toward her. It was not until he came into the brighter light of the room that his eyes rested fully upon her. Then he flung back his head and laughed.

"You've done it well," he said, "and you've won!"

His laugh and his tone were bitter. The glow crept from her face. She moved behind him until he could no longer see her. She stood at the window, deliberately silent, and at last he came to her side.

"I have been pestering myself with you all day," he flung at her. "I do not think I really was a brute this morning, yet I felt as if I had been."

"You are being rather a brute now," she said in a muffled voice. "You are not wait-

ing to hear what I had to say. It will make everything seem different."

"That is the whole danger of you," he cut in savagely. "You are almost convincing me that you are different, that everything you say or want is different; but it can't be. Nothing like that ever is."

"Like what?"

"Oh, damn!"

He sat down and plunged his fingers through his white hair, with the gesture she had come to know.

"Have you eaten?" she asked abruptly.

"No—I actually came here to invite you to eat with me. Then I have something to show you. Get dressed and come out."

"The reason you feel like this," she said, "is because you aren't giving the boy a chance. The wise, oldish man believes he is being forced into doing something against his judgment. He is angry because the boy has won. That is no way to begin a play day. I am not going to dinner with you, and after I have said all that I mean to say I don't believe you will have anything to show me. You mocked the girl who came out to meet you with a ribbon in her hair. You taunted her with a masquerade; but it was real. Perhaps you do not know that this is the first week I ever wore my hair without a ribbon. If I looked young, it is because I am young. I wasn't posing. You said I did it well. Why shouldn't I, when it is just me?"

Before he could speak she held up her hand.

"Wait until I'm through. This morning, when I came to you, it seemed as if I had too much to ask. We both hated it because you would have to use your money—that wise old money which has bought you so much that you could not value—to provide a playground. But"—she swept her arm around the little room—"this is all mine. Mr. Strome has probably told you how he has fixed everything. I shall have this place and money of my own, enough to buy all I shall need. I shall have nothing to ask, and much to give. That makes it different, doesn't it?"

Again she checked him when he would have spoken.

"At first I rebelled because Mr. Strome, and not you, had to be the fairy godfather; but now I am glad, because it is the only way I can make you know I am different, and real, and myself. You were right—youth is one of the things a man can't buy."

She wheeled abruptly and walked back to the window.

"Now what did you have to show me?" she asked.

He rose and stood by her side.

"I am ashamed," he confessed; "so much ashamed that I must not stay any longer to-night. I have a feeling that I have lived too long. I should be able to appreciate the realness of you. I have killed the boy, and you are right—I am being a brute; but give me credit for at least trying to be as honest as you have been. I would be even a greater brute if I pretended to believe that this, in the end, could be any different. It can't—that's all. Don't you suppose I loved the boy? I wanted to give him a fair chance, but it's useless to pretend."

"I was not pretending," she said; "but to-night is spoiled for us both. I was going to ask you to eat with me. I had a little feast to share with you—foolish little things that the boy would have liked, but that the man would find silly. They would seem to him as much a pretense as the ribbon in my hair."

She picked up his hat and stood with it in her hand near the door. He followed her and remained silent.

"Tell me," she said, "what was it that you had to show me?"

"A house."

She laughed.

"I imagine it was something splendid and expensive up on one of your broad avenues. How you would have hated it after a while!"

"You are very, very wise," he said, as she opened the door. "You are so wise that you frighten me!"

Christine waited at the door until she heard the elevator click again. Then she flung herself down on the pink-flowered bed and cried.

X

ALL through the rest of March, Christine made no sign to Graham and received no word from him. With regular routine Strome had come and gone. With an indifferent satisfaction she typed the verses he brought and received from him each week, in payment, a twenty-dollar bill.

Her chief pleasure was in adding new touches to the furnishings of her apartment, until the place had become like a distinct part of herself. Once, when Strome came, he brought her fifty dollars, explaining that

he had sold more books and pictures. With this she bought dainty underwear and soft chiffon waists.

She regarded each day as merely a time of preparation and waiting. Then, on the first day of April, when the call of spring was in the air, she believed that she had waited long enough.

She rose early that morning and searched the stand of a near-by florist for the most freshly suggestive young bunch of violets she could find. These she wrapped carefully in tissue, and buried a little note in their heart. Then she went to Graham's office.

No one was there, at this early hour, except the woman who was cleaning the place. Christine passed her with a brief word of explanation, made her way to Graham's desk, and arranged the violets on the top of his waiting mail.

She took a long walk through the city park before she returned to her apartment. Then she went about the rooms making expectant preparations. In the early afternoon she put on the softest of her chiffon waists and pinned near her throat a cluster of violets which she had withheld from Graham's bunch. To-day she did not tie her hair with a ribbon, but coiled it in a soft, loose knot at the back of her neck.

She was slender and fragrant and young as she stood there before her mirror, with a dark, vivid face and eager, restless hands. When she was fully dressed, she put on an enveloping apron and went into her kitchen.

At the hour when the first lights appear, in that soft early dark which Graham had said made its gripping appeal, she heard him ring the bell. While she was untying her apron, she called to him. When she came from the kitchen, he was standing in the dim light of the hall, in his arms a large square box. She took the box from him, and together they went into the room she had prepared.

"Roses!" she cried, as she commenced to break the string. "Little, close-curved pink roses!"

"How did you know?" he asked.

"They would be the youngest thing you could find. Then, too, I smell them."

They were roses—an enormous cluster of small buds. She held them against her cheek, and with the inevitable impulse of a woman buried her face in them. While she was arranging the flowers in a bowl, he hung his overcoat outside. Then he stooped to

pick up the scattered papers from the floor. When he returned, she stood before him with her hands held mysteriously behind her back.

"How long has it been," she said, "since you have worn a gorgeously beautiful thing like this?"

She held to view an absurd lavender smoking jacket.

"Never have I worn a thing like that," he denied. "Never!"

His dark eyes were shadowed. The corners of his mouth twitched, and finally, as if in spite of himself, he laughed. This time there was no bitterness in the sound.

Holding the coat in her arms, Christine stepped to the bowl of roses and broke off the smallest bud she could find. This she thrust through the buttonhole, and held the garment off at arm's length to note the effect.

"Did you ever see anything so graciously young in all your life?" she asked.

She soberly extended the sleeves in front of him. Graham rose, still laughing, took off his own blue coat, and thrust his arms into the sleeves of the jacket.

"You have no idea," she exulted, "how gorgeously it becomes your hair!"

It was as if her words had recalled him to some uneasy remembrance. His face grew sober, and he started to speak. She silenced him with a gesture.

"No," she objected, "we talked and analyzed before. We have absolutely nothing more to say. The boy has run away, we are both here, and it is April."

"All right!" His face cleared. "Then take down your hair and tie it back with a ribbon."

She went to obey him, and returned a few moments later with her face framed by the soft brown mass of her hair.

"Come!" she said. "Before the gods can possibly have a chance to grow angry and spoil our feast, we are going to eat. I have surprises."

"I saw them all in your kitchen."

"There is nothing in just seeing them. Wait until you have tasted!"

Then she fed him with foolish, indigestible things of delightful inconsistency and frothiness. It was indeed a meal at which a man must laugh. Before they had finished, Graham's eyes were dancing and years had fallen from his face.

"Now," she declared, "you are going to smoke, and I shall read to you."

She read from a volume of old fairy tales—the very tales from which the dreams of the boy had sprung. Her choice seemed artless, yet in reality it was consummate art. She read of knights and green forests and impossibly virtuous princesses. When she grew tired and tossed the book aside, she found him leaning forward, forgetting to smoke, gazing intently into her face.

"Will you come with me to-morrow," he asked, "out into the woods to look for the first violets? We can drive to Belmont and take our lunch. I have a camp out there."

"And let us start very early, before it is light," she cried, "so that we can ride into the sunrise! Wouldn't that be a splendid beginning for such a perfect plan?"

"The sunrise!" he mused. "I have not seen a sunrise for ten years."

"Then it will be fine! I can cook our dinner at the camp."

"Yes," he hesitated; "but, Christine, tell me—"

Again she held up a silencing hand, for she had caught the sudden graveness in his tone.

"No, we have talked enough. If I am to wake so early, you must go now, so that I can sleep." She rose and laid her hands gently on the edges of the lavender coat. "Come, we must take off the magic jacket," she said.

The gloom was chased from his face, and he reached the door without having voiced his misgivings. She kept up her smiles and intimate banter until the door had closed between them. Then she stood very still and thoughtful in the center of the room. As she turned to remove the dishes from the table, her hands were trembling.

The unexpected ringing of her bell brought the blood to her face in a flaming color. Graham had come back! Christine felt unprepared for his return. It was with a gasp of relief that she opened the door to admit Philip Strome. He came into the room and closed the door behind him. Without knowing exactly why, Christine was glad to see him.

"I have been waiting outside more than half an hour," he said. "I hope it is not too late for us to talk."

"No, it is not late; but why did you wait outside?"

"I saw Graham's car. I did not wish to meet him."

"Why not?" she asked, her voice holding the sharpness of challenge.

"I should have been tempted to accuse him of breaking his compact. I wanted, first, to make sure that he had."

"Are you expecting me to understand what you mean?" she asked.

Strome's quiet gray eyes were sweeping the room. They comprehended the mass of roses and the remains of a feast *à deux*. As they finally rested upon the lavender coat with its gay adornment, they narrowed, and the man's mouth set in a hard line.

"Yes, Christine," he answered, "I am expecting you to understand just what I mean; but first I want you to know that it matters a great deal to me what you do. I told Robert Graham that at the beginning, and I believe you must always have realized it. I let you come to Barbridge, and I made it possible for you to stay here, because I wanted you to learn to know yourself, and a little more of life, before you knew me. When you know yourself a little better, there are many other things I want to teach you."

Christine's first impulse was to flare out in resentment, to call him an egoist and a meddler; but Strome's gaze held her own, and some new warmth of feeling checked her.

"You say that you let me come?"

There was more of question than of mockery in her tone.

"I mean that I made no effort to prevent you. I gave you no idea that it was part of my plan."

"But why, why? Why have you any plans at all for me?"

"You are strangely alone, Christine," he reminded her gently. "Don't you like to feel that I care what happens to you? Not only because you are a sweet and mysterious little girl, but because you are yourself, a very real and individual part of my own life. Do you realize that there is nothing more alone in the world than a young and pretty girl without money or friends in a strange place? I suppose there are many thousands of them in our big cities, but it isn't a social problem that I am trying to solve. It isn't because you are a type or an experiment. It isn't because you are from the home town, or because I have you on my conscience. You aren't a duty. I am not protecting and shielding you simply to be kind. I tell you this because I want you to realize why I must ask you if Graham comes here often. Does he?"

"No, but I hope he will." She raised her

head and met Strome's eyes unflinchingly. "To-morrow I shall be with him all day at Belmont."

"Graham is married."

"Yes—he took me to see his wife. Are you playing square with him to talk like this when he is not here?"

Strome's eyes wandered to the coat, the roses, and the remains of the feast.

"He did not play square with me."

"How do you know?"

"Well, did he?"

"Absolutely."

"Then why does he come here? Why does he take you with him alone to his summer place to-morrow? Why, Christine, when there is nothing that you need from him, nothing that he has to offer which you now require?"

"And that is the glory of it," she said. "I need nothing at all that he can give me. Have you thought that perhaps there is much that I may give to him?"

Strome caught her arm and held it with a grip that hurt.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

She freed herself and stood apart from him quietly.

"I am sure that I do not mean what you do." She smiled and turned toward the door. "I am tired. Would you mind going now?"

"You are too young, too inexperienced, to know what you do mean," Strome accused hotly.

"It is because I am young and inexperienced that I have anything at all which would be of value to Mr. Graham. Do you want to spoil that?"

He moved to her side and stood with his hand on the knob.

"You aren't ready yet for me to tell you what I want," he said.

He opened the door and without further words passed down the hall. Christine moved about the room, making everything ready for an early start in the morning. Before hanging the lavender satin coat in the closet, she held it for a moment against her cheek. She smiled, and the color came back into her face.

XI

BEFORE it was light next morning Christine awakened with a sense of expectancy. Through her open window there came the soft, fresh warmth of early spring. She rose quickly and dressed with eager haste.

She had not felt so thoroughly alive since that first day when she had approached the city of her dreams. There was a nervous thrill underneath all her movements, and now and then she burst forth into snatches of gay song.

Graham was letting her have her own way. She smiled at the irony of the twisted problem. She, the girl who by all precedent should have been the unsophisticated victim, had reversed the order, and upon her rested the burden of the man's faith. He depended upon her to keep her youth and to bring him back his own.

She finally stood ready at the window. Her face was radiant and excited. When she saw his car stop in front of the house, she ran downstairs and met him before he reached the door.

Graham looked pale and a bit haggard in the morning light, as if he had not slept.

"You are as unbelievable as the morning," he told her.

"And you," she answered. There was a quiver in her voice, as if the joy of the approaching day brimmed over. "I was letting myself fear you might not come, after all."

He started to speak, but checked himself. Christine sensed that he was no longer the boy who had come to her last night.

He saw that she was comfortably settled by his side, and then they went forward into their day of adventure. She felt a sense of exhilaration in the gathering speed.

"Let's not go there at once," she begged. "Let's ride and ride and race the sunrise. Do you know, I have a queer feeling that this is going to be a unique sort of day, the kind of day that always stays!"

He looked down at her radiant, upturned face with a catch in his breath.

"A day like that, Christine, is usually either a beginning or an end of something too vivid to last. Only life's tameness can endure."

"And you can talk like that," she reproached, "when there is a glorious new sunrise every morning!"

He caught her meaning, and reflected it back upon her in a smile which chased the gloom from his face.

"I think we had better go directly to the lodge," he said. "Even if we drive quickly, we cannot get there much before noon."

"Does Mr. Strome know where it is?" she asked.

"Yes, but why do you ask that?"

He searched her face with a troubled frown. She started to tell him, and then reconsidered.

"I had no reason," she ended. "I just wondered."

They rode on in silence after that. Her question had sobered him and brought the haggard look back to his face. Suddenly he shook his shoulders, as if to cast off his troubled thoughts, and turned to her with a smile.

"I have a basket full of things for you to cook."

"That will be splendid!"

"And a great many questions to ask you."

Something in his tone kept her silent, and they rode on without further words, past several villages and into a narrow woodland road.

When they reached Belmont, Christine was startled at the isolation of the place. They turned into a long driveway, and continued through a thick grove which completely separated the house from the main thoroughfare. There were no other camps near it.

For an instant Christine glanced up into Graham's face with a flash of doubt; then, at the look which he bent upon her, she laughed. After all, it was he who had placed himself in her hands. She was ashamed that she had felt this sense of panic merely because the world was shut away from them.

She saw that the house was new. The paint seemed hardly dry.

"You have just built it?" she asked.

"Yes." He looked into Christine's face with a smile. "It is a sort of dedication to youth."

He took two keys from his pocket and placed one in her hand. Her fingers closed over it with a thrill. She followed him slowly up the steps and into a broad, low room which extended the full width of the house. Her eyes swept the place, taking in every detail.

"It is as if you had known all my dreams," she approved. "It is the freshest, cleanest, youngest room I ever saw!"

"This is the house I wanted to show you," he said. "Are we hungry? And is it cold enough for a fire?"

"It wouldn't be perfect without that, just to prove how different a fire can be from the crackling logs of Pengarry."

"Poor kid, did you hate it so?"

He went to the car and brought back the basket of food which she had promised to prepare. For an hour or more they were busy, as inconsequent as children over the preparation of the feast and the building of the fire.

While they ate, it seemed as if this were a time of suspension, as if they were waiting for some big moment still to come. When finally everything was cleared away, and the dishes were washed, they found that it was nearly four o'clock.

"And the real day has not yet commenced!" breathed Christine. "Yet it will be very late when we get back, if we stay any longer."

"Do we care, Christine?"

"I don't."

"Nor I. Come here by the fire and talk to me."

He sat on the couch, and she took her place on a low stool beside him. Her mind went back with a queer uneasiness to the day when she and Strome had sat in her old room at Pengarry. His words came back to her:

"You'll have to play on the level. Don't light a fire in your bedroom and ask Barbridge men to join you."

Of course this was different. She looked up into Graham's face, and saw that he was gazing into the fire with a troubled frown.

"Perhaps Strome is right," he began; "but to my mind he's letting you live on dreams that aren't real. He's giving you a false notion."

"I wonder what you mean?" she asked sharply.

"I don't want to spoil his little plan, but you're getting wrong ideas. He wouldn't let me do some of the things I suggested, and he wanted to work this out for you in his own way. Do you understand just how much in his debt he is placing you without letting you realize what you'll have to know sooner or later? He is living in your house out at Pengarry and paying about twice as much rent for your Barbridge apartment as the Pengarry place should bring. He has bought your old furniture and books, when he can't possibly have any use for them. He is letting you type his poetry. He writes it himself—mere drivel, I suppose—and pays you double the amount such work is worth. Also he comes down here about five times oftener than he did before you arrived."

She sprang to her feet with a sharp cry.

"I did not know! Why did you let me go on so long? He hasn't played fair!"

"To his way of thinking it's fair enough. It's his notion of keeping you from the pitfalls; but it seems to me it will make things harder when you have to shift for yourself. He can't keep it up long. I guess we'd better find some other way, Christine!"

A sense of helplessness and panic was growing upon her. She had felt so independent and secure, when in reality she simply had been accepting gifts from a man who asked nothing, in order that she need not accept the gifts of a man to whom she might give much.

"I was young, after all, to believe him, wasn't I?" she said bitterly.

She stood before Graham with her cheeks flushed and her eyes filling with tears. He reached up and drew her down to him.

"Let's not pretend any more, dear girl," he said. "Let's face life as it is!"

"But I am commencing to think I don't really know what it is, after all," Christine confessed.

"Some one will have to teach you, and it doesn't seem to me it can be Strome. Even if he tried, you'd have to learn again all your own way. I don't believe I'll hurt you, little Christine!"

Something in his face increased her sense of panic. Her heart was beating so hard that it nearly stifled her. He had drawn her down beside him, and his arms held her with a gentle insistence. Then suddenly she raised her head, and his lips were pressed hard against hers.

For a moment after that her hands gripped his arms; then she slowly pushed him away. Her cheeks had grown white.

"Is it this we have been meaning?" she whispered.

"Yes, Christine, just this. You knew—surely you knew! We can't play any more."

His arms reached for her again, and she rested without struggle against him. She was listless, as if all the youth had fallen from her. Her face looked strangely old and colorless.

"It has gone," she whispered, "whatever it was I wanted to give you. This that I have now is something utterly different—nothing that you really would want." She drew away, holding her hand against him to keep him from her. "I want to think. Will you go now and get the car?"

At her words he rose.

"I will let you think, Christine, and I'll come back in a little while."

When he had gone, she sat quite still, looking into the fire. Perhaps, after all, she had not meant anything so very different from this which had come to her. She had plunged into the unexplored without chart or compass. It was her own emotion which startled her now. It was the first time in her life that Christine ever had known fear of herself.

As she sat waiting for him to return, she saw that it was nearly seven o'clock. She realized that they could not reach her apartment before morning. All afternoon she must have foreseen this. He had put the question to her, and she had told him that she did not care if they were late; but everything had seemed so different then. Had Graham realized, too?

When he came back into the room, his brief absence seemed to have brought him fresh vigor. His eyes glowed, and he moved toward her with a new surety.

"Christine, I am sorry, but—"

He hesitated, and searched her face. The new lines upon it, and the dullness of her eyes, must momentarily have checked him.

"Dear," he began again, "it would be almost morning before we could reach Barbridge. I had not realized that time was passing so. Would it not be better to stay here comfortably—oh, Christine!"

Her eyes were turned full upon him, their dullness gone. There was the strain of her panic in her words.

"We must go! Surely you know we must go!"

"It cannot make any difference now, Christine, which we do. There is so much I want to tell you, so much we have to say to each other. Let us finish our day in full understanding. You remember, don't you, I told you that we couldn't be different, except in our own little ways? It has been sweet, this boy and girl play, but it couldn't last. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Don't talk, don't! You have spoiled something, I don't know just what. I guess I've never known. You were right—I am not different, because if I stayed, oh, don't you see, if I stayed—"

"What then, Christine, if you stayed?"

"Must we talk? Can't we keep just a little of the dream?"

"What woke you?"

"You know what woke me," she said

fiercely. "You've got to believe that I didn't realize before. I know now why they were trying to keep me from myself. I didn't even have sense enough to be afraid; but now that I am afraid I am going to run away. It isn't brave to run, perhaps, but that's what I've got to do, now and always. What you've taught me is enough. I couldn't realize any more, no matter how long I stayed!"

In her pocket she found the key which earlier he had given her. Miserably she held it out to him.

"I guess it's mostly my fault. You told me at the very first that it couldn't be so, and in a way you trusted me. I think I must have wronged you without meaning to do it!"

As she talked, he was looking down upon her with his face working strangely.

"That's the bravest little speech a girl ever made, Christine. You are very dear and very human, but you're brave. Yes—we'll go back right now. I want you to know and believe that you are different, for you are."

"No, not different—just afraid, that's all. Come, let's go!"

As they turned to the door, they heard a quick step on the path outside. Their eyes met in a startled question.

Even before Graham opened the door, Christine knew that Strome stood outside. It seemed inevitable that he should have come. Perhaps she had subconsciously held in her mind some such dénouement as this when she told him last night that she would be here with Graham all day.

Strome's first look, as he stepped into the room, was for her. It was a sharp, penetrating scrutiny, with a question behind it. She answered it with a quick raising of her head.

Before Strome could speak, Graham stepped forward and held out his hand.

"I am glad you have come, Strome," he said. "Have you a car?"

"No—I walked out from the end of the trolley line."

He spoke with a crisp coldness, and made no move to take the proffered hand.

"I was going to ask you to drive Christine back with you," Graham went on.

"Can you run my car?"

"I can," Christine said quickly. "I used to drive old Mr. Hemstead's car in Pengarry. Surely you will come too?"

"No—if you don't mind, I believe I'll

stay out here to-night. I am really glad that Strome has come."

Strome glanced at her thin coat.

"You will need something warmer," he said. "It has grown cold."

Graham rose instantly and took his overcoat from the hook.

"Wear this, Christine," he begged. She drew back and shook her head, but his arms fell insistently upon her shoulders. "Please!"

His eyes were looking deeply into her own, and she saw both regret and supplication. She turned quickly to put on the coat, and placed both her hands over his.

"Oh, I am sorry!" she said. "It was mostly my fault. There isn't anything we can say now, but will you come to see me to-morrow?"

"Yes, I will come. Good night, Christine. Good night, Strome. I shouldn't have kept her so long. It is going to be nearly morning before you get home."

But Strome had no further word for him. He held open the door and followed Christine to the car. She turned as she took her place at the wheel, but Graham had not left the house.

She drove slowly through the grove and out upon the main road. Strome had seated himself quietly beside her, and he leaned back to watch her profile in the gathering dusk.

"I suppose," she flashed, turning to him unexpectedly, "that you are thinking lots of things which are not true!"

"Perhaps," he said shortly.

"I'm not sure there is anything I can try to tell you about."

"Don't try."

"I must, because I don't want you to believe that he really meant what you think. It was I, from the very first, who made him do things he knew were not wise."

He looked at her sharply and started to speak, and then shut his lips tightly. Her eyes were on the road ahead, and her hands trembled on the wheel. They rode in silence until the dark settled down and she had to switch on the headlights. Then she turned to him again.

"Please," she begged, "please don't be thinking things!"

"Does it matter to you what I think, Christine?"

"What you think of him—yes."

"And of you?"

"You know about me, don't you? You've always known that I'm an ungrateful little wretch, a silly egoistic fool, and to-night just frightened and very, very sorry."

At her words a quick, illuminating smile broke the harshness of Strome's face. He reached out his hand and placed it gently over her strained fingers.

"That's all right, dear—I do know. Let me drive now. You are tired."

"Can you?"

"Yes."

He opened the door, and, as she stopped the car, he went to the other side. She slipped over into his place and leaned back against the cushions with a little sigh of relief.

He did not start the car at once, but sat in the dusk, looking down into her face. Suddenly she crumpled up and leaned against him.

"Just be kind to me, please," she said.

"You do not hate kind folks to-night, then, little Christine? Perhaps that's just as well, because I brought Mrs. Barton out with me. She's waiting at the Belmont Inn."

She raised her head quickly.

"Oh, take me to her! But will she think—"

"No," he assured her. "I told her that you had come out here on business, and wanted her to meet you at the inn. She was pleased to think you needed her."

At that Christine leaned back, with her head just touching his sleeve. She wanted this sense of nearness, which brought a comforting knowledge of protection.

"You have always been very good to me," she said. "I haven't realized until just now how much I need you. I think, when I go back to Pengarry one of these days, I shall be glad that it is you who are living in the old house, and you who bought all the old things. It has been you who stood between me and all that Estelle Porter faced. I don't know just why you have been so good to me!"

"I don't believe I'll try to tell you just why to-night, Christine; but some day you are going to know."

"I think I know now," she whispered, "and I am glad!"

Then Strome started the car forward slowly, so that he might not disturb her head against his arm.

